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Vol. 20

Issue 13

Friday 29 May to 5 June 2021

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## Ransomware

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# Indian-Origin Family In US Returns \$1 Million Ticket To Woman Who Threw It Away

*The ticket was not fully scratched off and it sat in a pile in the store for 10 days until the son of the Indian-origin store owners, noticed the unfinished USD 30 ticket in the trash.*

(Insider Bureau)-A woman in the US state of Massachusetts threw away her shot at USD 1 million, but as luck would it, she got a second chance at the fortune, thanks to an Indian-origin family who returned the discarded lottery ticket to their long-time customer, earning appreciation for their honesty.

Lea Rose Fiega bought a Diamond Millions scratch-off ticket in March at Lucky Stop, a store owned by the Indian-origin family in Southwick, where she was a regular customer.

"I was in a hurry, on lunch break, and just scratched it real quick, and looked at it, and it didn't look like a winner, so I handed it over to them to throw away," Ms

Fiega said on Monday.

But the ticket was not fully scratched off and it sat in a pile in the store for 10 days until Abhi Shah, son of the store owners, noticed the unfinished USD 30 ticket in the trash, the New York Post reported.

Mr Abhi said the winning ticket was sold by his mother Aruna Shah to one of their regular customers.

"One evening, I was going through the tickets from the trash and [noticed] that she didn't scratch the number. I scratched the number and it was USD 1 million underneath the ticket," Mr Abhi was quoted as saying by the local TV station WWLP.

"I was a millionaire for a night,"

he joked.

Mr Abhi said he initially thought of buying a Tesla car, but later decided to return the winning ticket.

"I mean I had USD 1 million in my hand and on the other hand I wanted to do something good," he said.

The family said it was not an easy decision to return the ticket.

"We didn't sleep two nights," said Maunish Shah, owner of Lucky Spot.

"He called my mom, grandparents in India, they said, 'Give it back, we don't want that money,'" Mr Maunish said.

The family then decided to return the ticket. Since the customer visited the store often, they knew where to find her.

The younger Shah came to find Fiega at work and told her his parents wanted to see her, according to the lottery winner.



"I said 'I'm working,' and he said 'no you have to come over'. So, I went over there and that's when they told me. I was in total disbelief. I cried, I hugged them," Fiega said.

The other customers of the store are not surprised that the Shahs did the right thing.

"They're just purely good people. You can tell by just talking to them," one customer

was quoted as saying by WBZ TV, a CBS-owned-and-operated television station licensed to Boston, Massachusetts.

The family is now fielding congratulatory calls and interview requests from across the country. "If I had kept that million, I wouldn't have been this famous. So, I'm glad I gave it back," Mr Abhi said.

## Indian-Origin Man Acquitted In Drug Trafficking Case In Singapore: Report



(Insider Bureau)-A 50-year-old Malaysian of Indian descent escaped the gallows in Singapore after he was acquitted of drug trafficking charges by the High Court here on Wednesday, according to a media report.

Mangalagiri Dhruva Kumar, a driver by profession, was accused of driving into Singapore on May 16, 2014, and handing a bag containing heroin to a woman named Shanti Krishnan, The Straits Times reported.

In a written judgement, Justice Valerie Thean said the only evidence that Mangalagiri had supplied the drugs was Shanti's testimony.

But the judge concluded that Shanti's evidence was not reliable.

Justice Thean noted that Shanti was not able to recall the various events of the transactions well. Shanti's testimony in court also deviated from her statements to narcotics officers, taken in the days following her arrest in May 2014.

Prosecutors produced phone records showing a total of six calls between Shanti and Mangalagiri on May 16, 2014 and on April 19, 2014. But the judge said at most, this showed that the two knew each other.

Prosecutors also raised instances of suspicious behaviour by Mangalagiri, including a large volume of calls between him and an unknown number shortly after Shanti's arrest.




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# Indian-Origin British MP Opens Up On Mental Health Struggle: "I Hope..."

**Nadia Whittome, traditionally referred to as the "Baby of the House" in the Commons as its youngest member, said she had decided to be open about her "mental health struggle".**

(Insider Bureau)-An Indian-origin UK Member of Parliament, who is also Britain's youngest MP in the House of Commons, on Tuesday announced on social media that she will be taking "several weeks" off her parliamentary work for mental health reasons.

Nadia Whittome, born in the UK to a Punjabi father and representing her birthplace of Nottingham in central England for the Opposition Labour Party since her win in the December 2019 General Election, said she

was suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and had tried to balance her full-time work with the condition but had now been advised by her doctor to take time off.

The 24-year-old, traditionally referred to as the "Baby of the House" in the Commons as its youngest member, said she had decided to be open about her "mental health struggle" to help others talk about similar issues. "Over recent months, I have been battling some persistent health issues. Until now, I have been

attempting to manage them alongside continuing with my full time work as an MP," Ms Whittome said in a statement posted on Twitter.

Unfortunately, it has become clear that this is not feasible and I have been advised by my doctor that I need to take several weeks off in order for my health to improve," she said.

The MP added that she feels it is important for her to be honest that it is mental ill-health she is suffering from - specifically post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).



"One in four people will experience mental health problems each year, but there is still a great deal of shame and stigma surrounding it. Through being open about my own mental health struggle, I hope that others will also feel able to talk about theirs, and that I can play a small role in creating greater acceptance and facilitating healthier discussions around this issue," she said.

## Pact With India Sets Gold-Standard On Immigration: UK's Priti Patel

**Earlier this month, I signed a ground-breaking agreement with India. It tackles illegal migration, both in the UK and in India, said UK Home Secretary Priti Patel**



UK Home Secretary Priti Patel on Monday described the recently signed Migration and Mobility Partnership (MMP) with India as a new gold-standard for immigration, which will open up opportunities for thousands of British and Indian citizens to live and work legally in each other's countries.

In a major speech to mark the launch of a 'New Plan for Immigration', the Indian-origin Cabinet minister referenced the MMP signed with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar during his London visit earlier this month as a ground-breaking initiative that tackles illegal migration in both countries and paves the way for the UK government's firm but fair post-Brexit immigration system. Earlier this month, I signed a ground-breaking agreement with India. It tackles illegal migration, both in the UK and in India, accelerating the process of those who have no legal right to stay, said Patel.

"But it also gives opportunities for thousands of British and Indian citizens to live and work legally in each other's countries. This

agreement shows the way forward as we strive for a new gold-standard for immigration one which is both fair and firm, she said.

Under the MMP, the UK and India have agreed to work towards an April 2022 timeline to bring in new systems in place which will include a new bespoke plan for 18 to 30 year olds to apply for a 24-month stay to live and work in either country and also speedier deportation of illegal migrants, including streamlining extradition processes.

Patel's speech on Monday, addressed to the think tank British Future, was timed for the launch of proposals for a new fully digital border regime over the next few years, which the minister said will provide the ability to count people in and count people out of the country.

We are working on further reforms, including Electronic Travel Authorisations, as part of a simpler and more secure, universal permissions to travel requirement, the minister said. Our new plan will make it easier to identify potential threats before

they reach the border, through targeted and effective interventions from co-ordinated multi-agency operations, she said.

Patel, whose Gujarati-origin family migrated from Uganda in the 1970s, reflected on her own journey as she laid out her plans to get tough on immigration crime and fix the UK's broken asylum system to take back control of immigration. Immigration is part of my own story. My family were forced from Uganda and they had the privilege to make a home in the UK. They worked ferociously hard to keep a roof over our heads and secure a life for my family, recalled the 49-year-old senior Conservative Party leader.

I am proud as a Briton and I am proud of my parents and of my British Indian background. And I join the millions of British Indians and children of migrant families who have established a life in one of the greatest countries in the world. But there are many who struggle with this concept, she said.

The minister pointed to the 2016 referendum in favour of Britain's exit from the European Union (EU) as a sign of the silent majority who look to the Conservative Party led government to establish appropriate measures and border

controls on who comes to and settles in the UK.

I believe in fairness and in law and order... The simple reality is it is not possible for everyone who wants to come and live here to do so. The concept of open borders' is a flawed one, she noted.

Her speech coincides with the UK Home Office laying out details of its New Plan for Immigration', which intends to transform the country's border management over the next four years. The implementation of an end-to-end digital system and streamlining of visa processes will lie at the



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# UAE Healthcare Groups Step In To Help Indian Nurses Duped By Job Scams

*The nurses welcomed the support, saying that they were overwhelmed to see the response from the healthcare groups here.*

(Insider Bureau)-Some prominent UAE healthcare organisations have come forward to offer employment to nurses from India who were duped by recruitment agencies on the pretext of providing them jobs at COVID-19 vaccination and testing centres in the Gulf country, according to a media report.

Several nurses from Kerala are stranded in the UAE after being duped by recruitment agencies which charged exorbitant commissions ranging from ? 200,000 (USD 2,743) to ? 350,000 (USD 4,800), the Gulf News reported.

They were falsely offered jobs at COVID-19 vaccination and testing centres in the UAE.

Some of the top executives of the leading healthcare groups have expressed willingness to hire the nurses, including those who have not yet secured a local medical licence, saying they

would be provided assistance to get a licence in the coming months if they have the required qualification and experience.

Dr Azad Moopen, chairman and managing director of Aster DM Healthcare, said: "We are ready to hire whoever is qualified and has sufficient experience with or without licence. They should be able to perform well in the interview. If they don't have a licence, we can start processing their visas and provide them support to try for a licence."

He said that his group needs 300 nurses on account of two hospitals coming up in Dubai and Sharjah.

Dr Sanjay M Paithankar, managing director of Right Health, said that this group was also willing to hire up to 40 nurses.

"We have just opened five more facilities in Dubai. They can join immediately. There are flats ready to accommodate them.

We will arrange visa, accommodation, transportation plus basic salary till they get the Dubai Health Authority (DHA) license. Our company will also help them appear for tests to get a DHA licence."

Those who are not qualified to apply for the DHA licence have also been offered jobs as assistants.

Michael Brenden Davis, CEO of NMC Healthcare, said: "We are unable to guarantee job placements without proper diligence. However, our team is anxious to review CVs of those affected, to assess if we would be in a position to help".

Meanwhile, Consul General of India in Dubai Dr Aman Puri told the Gulf News on Wednesday that the stranded nurses must report the matter to the mission so that they can be assisted with repatriation.

"We have been in touch with the associations and community



groups. So far, nobody has approached us seeking help for repatriating stranded nurses. The consulate is willing to assist whoever needs help. If anyone complains about any recruitment agency, we will forward it to the state government for taking action," he said.

The nurses welcomed the support, saying that they were overwhelmed to see the response from the healthcare groups here.

Apart from the new hospital openings, Dr Moopen cited

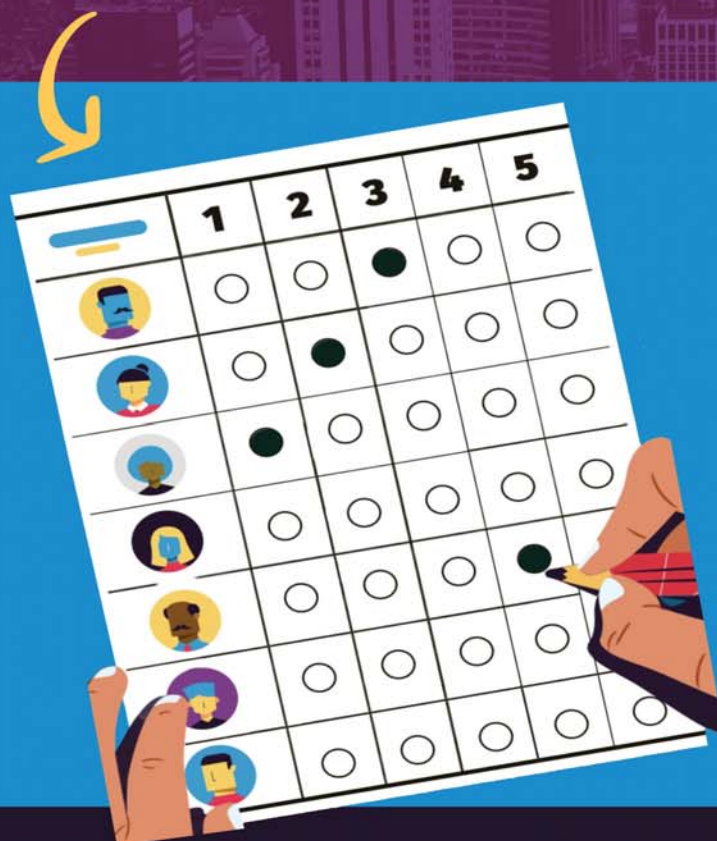
multiple reasons for the huge number of vacancies for nurses in the UAE.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, he said, many health-care workers who went to India did not come back due to flight suspension or due to various other reasons.

The UAE on Saturday reported 1,596 new COVID-19 cases, bringing the total number of infections to 554,516. Four more fatalities took the death count to 1,648, the report said.

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# As Cyclone Yaas Nears, Kolkata Airport To Suspend Ops, Army Deployed

*Around 1.4 million people in Odisha and half a million people in Bengal have been evacuated from their homes. Officials said it has been a challenge to provide them accommodation while maintaining social distancing.*

(News Agencies)- Cyclone Yaas has intensified into a very severe cyclonic storm and will make landfall between Dhamra Port and Balasore on the Odisha coast at noon today with wind speed of upto 185 km per hour. It is expected to pass over Bengal too.

Here are the Top 10 points in this big story: The cyclone is very likely to cross north Odisha-West Bengal coasts between Paradip and Sagar Island, met office chief M Mohapatra has told NDTV. The maximum wind speed of Yaas is expected to be up to 185 km per

hour between 5.30 and 11.30 am along the north Odisha coast as the cyclone approaches the land. Around 3 million people in Odisha and half a million people in Bengal have been evacuated from their homes. Officials said it has been a challenge to provide them accommodation while maintaining social distancing. Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik took stock of the situation in coastal districts, where heavy rain coupled with strong winds have started. "Every life is precious, thus all possible steps should be taken to protect

life," he said. Odisha's districts of Jagatsinghpur, Kendrapara, Bhadrak and Balasore districts are likely to be affected. In Bengal, the districts of West Midnapore, North and South 24 Parganas -- and state capital Kolkata -- may experience storm with wind speeds of up to 120 km per hour. Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has announced she will stay at the state secretariat tonight to monitor the rescue and relief operation. Governor Jagdeep Dhankar visited the secretariat in the evening. The army has



deployed 17 columns-- each with around 100 men -- in Bengal, nine of them have been stationed in Kolkata. The rest are in Purulia, Birbhum, Bardhaman, Howrah Hooghly, Nadia and North 24 Parganas districts. Besides, National Disaster Response Force

teams, 54,000 officers and relief workers, 2 lakh police and Home Guard personnel, will also be deployed. Flight operations at the Kolkata airport will be suspended from 8:30 am to 7:45 pm today, reported news agency ANI quoting airport administration.

## Mumbai Records Lowest Deaths Since April 9, 1,037 New Covid Cases



*Almost 21,000 Covid tests were conducted in the financial capital and the positivity rate remained at 4.94 per cent.*

(News Agencies)- Mumbai recorded 1,037 coronavirus cases and 37 deaths (lowest since April 9) in the last 24 hours maintaining a steady decline in infections for the past few days. Maharashtra recorded

24,136 cases and 601 deaths in the last 24 hours. Almost 21,000 Covid tests were conducted in the financial capital and the positivity rate remained at 4.94 per cent. The World Health Organisation

(WHO) has declared Covid positivity rate below 5 per cent to be within the safe zone. The dip in cases can be attributed to the state-wide lockdown in Maharashtra that has bore the brunt of the deadly second wave of Covid as it swept the country. For now, the lockdown will be in place in the state till June 1. Mumbai, a densely populated city, saw an upward trend in Covid cases a month ago and reached numbers that left the healthcare system crippled across the country. The Maharashtra capital saw an

acute shortage of oxygen but controlled the Covid graph with timely solutions. The city, central to the country's already battered economy, managed the trajectory of the virus effectively. But it is to be noted that the city has been the epicentre of the virus twice. Mumbai now has over 11,000 oxygen beds, over 2,500 ICU beds and around 1,500 ventilator beds to tackle the outbreak. The recovery rate stands at 94 per cent in Mumbai and cases are being doubled every 345 days. The city's largest slum

Dharavi reported only seven fresh cases. Promoted Listen to the latest songs, only on JioSaavn.com The city reported over 6.99 lakh infections since the beginning of the pandemic. Out of those, over 6.55 lakh patients have recovered and discharged from hospitals. Over 27,000 Covid cases are active in the city. Maharashtra has over 3.14 lakh active cases and its positivity rate is much higher than that of its capital at 16.77 per cent. The state has a recovery rate of 92.76 per cent and a fatality rate of 1.61 per cent.

## Delhi Receives Highest Rainfall For May In 13 Years: Weather Department

(News Agencies)- Delhi received 144.8 mm rainfall in May this year, the highest for the month in 13 years, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD). "No rain is predicted in the next four to five days. So, this is the highest rainfall in May since 2008," Kuldeep Srivastava, the head of the IMD's regional forecasting centre, said today. The Safdarjung Observatory, considered the official marker for the city, had recorded 21.1 mm rainfall last year, 26.9 mm in 2019 and 24.2 mm in 2018. It had gauged 40.5 mm precipitation in 2017; 24.3 mm in 2016; 3.1 mm in 2015 and 100.2 mm in 2014, according to IMD data. The observatory recorded nine rain days in May this year, the maximum since 2014, when it



had received rainfall on 10 days.

It had recorded seven rain days last year and five such days in 2018.

A record 119.3 mm rainfall had pounded Delhi under the impact of cyclonic storm Tauktae and a western disturbance between 8.30 am on Wednesday and 8.30 am on Thursday last week, breaking all the previous records for May. This was double the previous record rainfall of 60 mm on May 24 in 1976, according to the IMD.

Since the maximum temperature is predicted to remain below the 40 degrees Celsius-mark till May 31, this is likely to be the first time since 2014 that Safdarjung did not record a heatwave in the pre-monsoon period.

## Rahul Gandhi To Organise Sanitation Drive In UP's Amethi: Congress

(News Agencies)-Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has sent oxygen concentrators to Amethi, his former constituency in Uttar Pradesh, and will also

litres of sanitisers will soon be arriving in Amethi and teams have been formed to carry out the drive amid the second wave of COVID-19.



Mr Singhal added that the former Congress president had already sent five oxygen concentrators and 20 oxygen cylinders to the district on May 21 while 15 more

concentrators were dispatched on Tuesday. Mr Gandhi is currently the Lok Sabha MP from Wayanad in Kerala.

organise a sanitation campaign in the district, a party official said today. District Congress president Pradeep Singh said 10,000



# President Kovind Greets People On The Eve Of Buddha Purnima

***Buddha Purnima 2021: "On the auspicious occasion of Buddha Purnima, I extend my best wishes...", President Kovind said***

(News Agencies)- President Ram Nath Kovind on Tuesday greeted people on the eve of Buddha Purnima and prayed that the country emerges successfully from the COVID-19 pandemic. "We are faced with an unprecedented crisis in the form of COVID-19 pandemic. On this auspicious festival of Buddha Purnima, I pray that through our solidarity and

collective resolve, may we emerge successfully from this pandemic and continue to move steadfastly towards the well-being of people at large," President Kovind said. In his message for Buddha Purnima, President Kovind said, the teachings of Lord Buddha lead us to the path of freedom from suffering and misery. "He taught people to stay away from

violence and injustice and this very mantra has been motivating us for centuries to become ideal human beings, the President added. The ideals of non-violence, peace, compassion and service to humanity embodied in the life of Lord Buddha, and his eternal teachings have profoundly influenced the development of human civilization all over the world, the President said.



"On the auspicious occasion of citizens and followers of Lord Buddha Purnima, I extend my Buddha all over the world," he said. best wishes to all the fellow said.

## Over 650 Fake Remdesivir Vials Seized From Himachal Plant, 11 Arrested



***Eleven persons were arrested in the operation, said police, adding, they were selling the vials to patients at an exorbitant rate.***

(News Agencies)-A Himachal Pradesh was raided "pharmaceutical unit" in and shut down following the

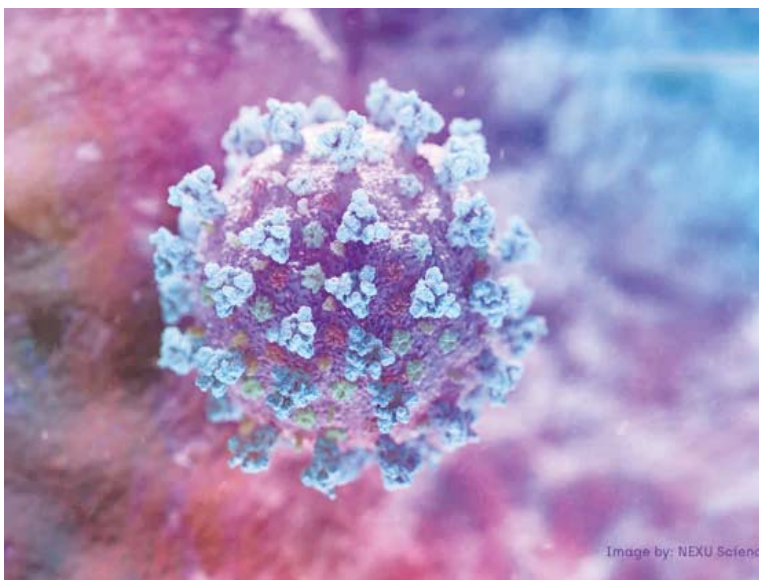
recovery of 673 fake Remdesivir injections, a key drug in the treatment of COVID-19, said Haryana Police. Eleven persons were arrested in the operation, said police, adding, they were selling the vials to patients at an exorbitant rate. A Haryana police spokesperson said the manufacturing unit Alfin Drugs Pvt Ltd., owned by Dilpreet Singh in

Nalagarh, was manufacturing large quantities of fake Remdesivir injections. The Himachal drug control authorities were also present when the unit was sealed by the Haryana Police. Efforts to arrest other members of the syndicate are underway, said the spokesperson, urging citizens to inform the police about black-marketing of COVID-19

medicines.

The spokesperson informed that an FIR was registered at Ambala police station on April 21 after 24 Remdesivir vials were recovered from the possession of four accused. The accused, said police, were found to have a connection with the Remdesivir injections which were thrown in the canal at village Salempur PS Chamkor Sahib in Punjab.

## Gujarat Villagers Take Out Religious Procession To "Prevent Coronavirus", 86 Arrested: Cops



(News Agencies)- More than 80 people were arrested after a social media video showed them participating in a religious procession for performing a ritual to "protect" their village from the scourge of coronavirus in Prantij taluka in Gujarat's Sabarkantha district, police said on Tuesday. Over a hundred people from Lalpur village took out the

procession on May 22 to perform a ritual with a belief that it will "prevent coronavirus" from affecting their village, a local police official said. He said some members of the procession beat drums while others, including women, carried a "kalash" or a small pot filled with sacred water on their heads. Police came to know about the

incident on Monday after a video went viral on social media, said Prantij police inspector PL Vaghela.

"We have registered an FIR against 28 identified and a hundred unidentified people for participating in the procession in violation of the government's notification regarding the coronavirus pandemic. We arrested 83 people in the last two days," the officer said.

A case was registered against the participants of the procession, including women, under the provisions of the Epidemic Diseases Act, the Disaster Management Act, and under section 188 (disobedience to order duly issued by public servant) of the Indian Penal Code, he said. A similar incident had occurred in Navapura village in Ahmedabad district of the state earlier this month wherein a large number of women turned up at a religious event to "eradicate coronavirus".

## Girl Kidnapped By Man From Chhattisgarh Rescued: Jammu Police



(News Agencies)-A girl who was allegedly kidnapped from Jammu by a man from Chhattisgarh was rescued on Monday by the police, officials said. The accused, identified as Lallu, a resident of Jangir in Chhattisgarh, has been arrested, they said. In a written complaint, the girl's mother said that her daughter had gone missing since May 15 and she suspected that three people from Chhattisgarh might have

kidnapped her, they said.

A case was registered in Jammu's Janipur police station and an investigation was initiated, they said. After this, special teams were constituted and one team connected various leads and with the support of technical assistance of the police of the concerned areas rescued the girl, they said. Further investigation is underway.



# Lakshadweep Changes Trigger Cry For Administrator's Recall

**The Lakshadweep administration suffered a setback as the Kerala High Court today stayed its order.**

(News Agencies)- Opposition parties on Tuesday stepped up their campaign seeking recall of Lakshadweep administrator Praful Patel for allegedly carrying out "anti-people" reforms in the islands, while the BJP defended him, as the Kerala High Court stayed an order of the administration.

CPI(M) veteran and Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan described reports from Lakshadweep as quite serious. In a tweet, he said Kerala has a strong relationship with the islands and condemned "devious efforts" to thwart it.

The Lakshadweep administration suffered a setback as the Kerala

High Court today stayed its order directing the Assistant Public Prosecutor (APP) to attend pending legal works of various government departments, instead of carrying out his duties in the courts there.

The court granted the stay on a PIL by an islander Mohammed Saleem challenging the administration's directive to the APP posted in Andrott and Amini islands, to attend to legal works of several departments, including preparation of chargesheet to help the police.

Lakshadweep is under the jurisdiction of the Kerala High Court.

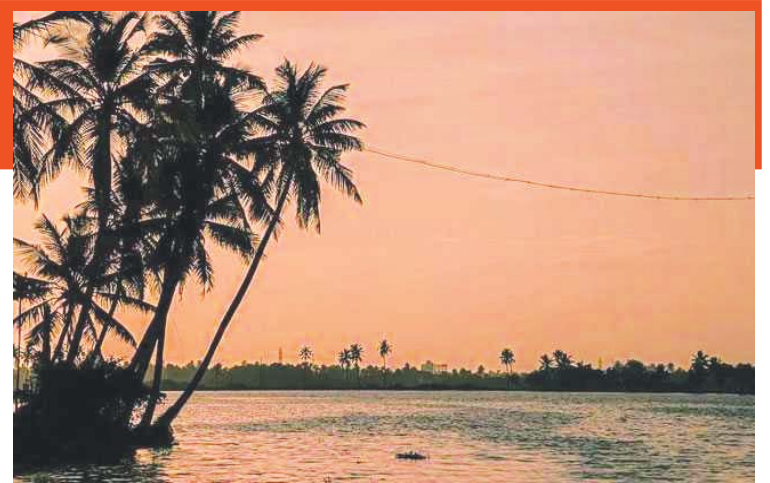
The petitioner alleged that the

order was a rampant abuse of power and an absolute failure of the justice delivery system, particularly in the Criminal Justice System of Lakshadweep.

During the hearing, the high court orally told Counsel for the administration that the affairs in Lakshadweep were being noticed by it.

The court's observation came amid protest by islanders seeking recall of Patel.

The anti-BJP parties have alleged that Patel unilaterally lifted restrictions on the use of alcohol in the Muslim-majority islands, banned beef products, citing animal preservation and



demolished fishermen's sheds built on the coastal areas, saying they violated the Coast Guard Act.

Leaders of opposition parties, including senior CPI(M) leader and Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, and AICC general secretary KC Venugopal also came out against the administration's reform

measures. "News reports from Lakshadweep are quite serious. Challenges imposed on their lives, livelihoods and culture cannot be accepted. Kerala has a strong relationship, a long history of cooperation with LD. Unequivocally condemn devious efforts to thwart it. Perpetrators should desist," Mr Vijayan said in a tweet.

## India-New Zealand Talks Focus On Defence, Climate Change, Vaccines

**India-New Zealand Talks: The topics discussed by the two sides included defence and security, trade and investment, and space, among others.**

(News Agencies)-India and New Zealand on Tuesday carried out a comprehensive review of the bilateral ties and decided to enhance the depth and momentum of engagement in areas of defence and security, counter-terrorism, cybersecurity and climate change. At a virtual meeting held under the framework of India-New Zealand foreign office consultations, the two sides also discussed issues relating to access to vaccines and

medicines to contain the coronavirus pandemic globally, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said. Both sides exchanged views on various regional issues and reiterated the importance of closer cooperation for a rules-based international order and a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific region, it said. "Comprehensively reviewing ongoing bilateral cooperation, both sides discussed the steps to be taken to enhance the depth

and momentum of engagement in different areas including defence and security, trade and investment, space, counterterrorism, cybersecurity, disarmament and climate change, and for strengthening people-to-people ties," the MEA said. "They also discussed ways to strengthen coordination in multilateral and regional fora," it said in a statement. The Indian delegation at the third Foreign Office Consultations was led by



Riva Ganguly Das, Secretary (East) in the MEA. The New Zealand side was headed by Mark Sinclair, Deputy Secretary, Americas and Asia Group, in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The previous round of

consultations had taken place on February 5, 2019, in New Delhi. "The consultations were held in a friendly and cordial atmosphere. Both sides agreed to hold the next consultations at a mutually convenient date," the MEA said.

## Wrestler Sushil Kumar, Arrested In Murder Case, Suspended By Railways



**Wrestler Sushil Kumar, who had been on the run for close to three weeks, was arrested along with his aide Ajay from northwest Delhi's Mundka on Sunday.**

the run for close to three weeks, was arrested along with his aide Ajay from northwest Delhi's Mundka on Sunday.

"Sushil Kumar was detained in police custody on 23rd May, 2021 for a period exceeding forty-eight hours. Now, therefore Sushil Kumar JAG/ (Adhoc) IRTS is deemed to have been suspended with effect from the date of detention i.e. 23rd May, 2021 in terms of Rule 5 (2) of (D&A) Rules, 1968 and shall remain under suspension until

further orders," the Railways said in a statement.

On deputation with the Delhi government since 2015, Mr Kumar was posted as an Officer on Special Duty at Chhatrasal Stadium for development of sports at the school level.

The deputation was extended in 2020 and he had applied for an extension for 2021 as well which had been rejected by the Delhi government, reported news agency PTI. He was sent back to his parent cadre, Northern

Railway, PTI reported quoting officials.

Sushil Kumar and his associates, say police, assaulted fellow wrestler Sagar Rana, 23, and his two friends on May 4 at Chhatrasal Stadium. All three had to be hospitalised. Mr Rana later died of his injuries.

The Delhi Police had announced a reward of ₹ 1 lakh for information leading to the arrest of Sushil Kumar, who had since been on the run.

(News Agencies)- Olympic medallist Sushil Kumar was suspended by Railways today after his arrest in the

kidnapping and murder of a 23-year-old wrestler inside Chhatrasal Stadium in Delhi. The wrestler, who had been on



# Fear Of Death From Covid Not Grounds For Pre-Arrest Bail: Supreme Court



**Uttar Pradesh had approached the Supreme Court last week against an Allahabad High Court order that said anticipatory bail could be granted in view of the surge in Covid cases and overcrowding in jails**

challenging an Allahabad High Court order that said anticipatory bail could be granted on grounds of apprehension of death in view of the surge in Covid cases and overcrowding in jails.

"You (the UP government) have a problem with observations made... sweeping observations (that) all persons be granted anticipatory bail... we are staying the sweeping observations and further orders," Justices Vineet Saran and BR Gavai told Solicitor General Tushar Mehta. The debate over anticipatory bail was triggered after the High Court allowed Prateek Jain - a conman

The High Court also quoted a Supreme Court order from earlier this month, in which the latter court said "...prisons in India are overburdened... requirement of decongestion is a matter concerning the health and right to life of both the prison inmates and the police personnel".

The Supreme Court bench - led by Chief Justice NV Ramana - had ordered the release of prisoners who were granted bail or parole last year. This was done keeping in mind the nature of their offences. Each prisoner's release, therefore, depended on the crime and a recommendation by a panel.

(News Agencies)- Anticipatory bail cannot be granted on grounds of fear of death due to COVID-19, the Supreme Court said Tuesday afternoon, as it stayed an Allahabad High Court order on the subject. Anticipatory bail must be based on the merits of each individual case, the top court stressed, adding that the High Court's order could not be used as precedent by other courts. The top court was responding to a petition filed by the Uttar Pradesh government last week

## India's Daily Covid Cases (1.96 Lakh) Below 2 Lakh, First Since April 14: 10 Points



After Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh have the highest number of infections.

Karnataka, the state worst-affected by coronavirus in the second wave, saw 25,311 new cases. Capital Bengaluru logged 5,701 infections, slightly fewer than the previous day's figures. Tamil Nadu saw a slight dip in daily Covid cases and deaths with 34,867 fresh cases and 404 deaths. 4,985 of the new infections are from capital Chennai.

Neighbouring Kerala on Monday recorded 17,821 new coronavirus cases amid a decline in testing. 196 Covid-linked deaths were reported today, the state's

highest single-day count.

Delhi recorded 1,550 fresh coronavirus cases, the lowest single-day tally since March 27, and 207 deaths on Monday.

Uttar Pradesh, the country's most populous state, recorded 3,894 new COVID-19 cases in the last 24 hours. 153 Covid patients died in the same period. It is fifth in the list of worst-hit states in India. In Haryana, 3,757 new infections were reported in the last 24 hours. Coronil - the controversial 'ayurvedic medicine' from yoga guru Ramdev's company Patanjali - will be part of the state government's free Covid kit for patients.

Even as many states are facing a massive challenge of

vaccinating people amid shortage of domestic vaccines, US vaccine makers Pfizer and Moderna have turned down requests to supply Delhi and Punjab with their vaccines. Both cited official policy and said they would only deal with the centre.

Amid the new challenge of Black Fungus cases in a large number of recovered Covid patients, AIIMS chief Randeep Guleria on Monday warned against creating "confusion" by giving fungal infections different colours based on how they infect the body. After Black and White Fungus, a case of Yellow Fungus emerged, according to reports.

(News Agencies)-India's daily new Covid cases fell below two lakh for the first time since April 14 as 1.96 lakh fresh cases pushed the total to 2.69 crore. With 3,511 patients dying in the last 24 hours, states are scrambling to get vaccines amid a big shortage. Maharashtra on Monday reported 22,122 fresh coronavirus cases and 592 fatalities, taking the tally of infections to over 56.02 lakh and the death count to 89,212.

## Major Fire Breaks Out At Oil Refinery In Visakhapatnam

(News Agencies)- Huge plumes of thick smoke were seen after a fire broke out at a Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL) plant in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, today. Fire engines were rushed to the spot to douse the fire.

A warning bell was immediately sounded to make the employees evacuate the plant. At least 100 employees were at the plant at the time of the incident.

The HPCL company, in a tweet, said the fire has been extinguished, there were no casualties and everyone is safe. "A fire incident occurred in one of the crude processing units of

HPCL's Visakh Refinery at 3pm on 25th May 2021. Safety measures and firefighting was activated immediately. The fire has been extinguished. There is no casualty and no risk to public. Other Refinery operations are normal," it said. "It is to confirm that there is no casualty. All people are accounted and are safe. Fire is extinguished completely. Except the particular unit where fire occurred, all other process units of Visakh Refinery are operating normally," it added. The cause of the incident is not yet known, officials said.

The blast was reported at Unit-3 plant in HPCL, the police said. Visakhapatnam District Collector

V Vinay Chand said the fire was doused quickly, averting major damage. "There were no casualties nor was anyone injured in the mishap," the collector said.

Teams from HPCL, personnel from the Eastern Naval Command and the Andhra Pradesh State Disaster Response and Fire Services Department managed to put out the fire in a swift operation.

HPCL runs a 8.3 million tonnes a year oil refinery at Visakhapatnam, according to news agency PTI. The unit turns crude oil into value added fuels like petrol and diesel. The fire will likely lead to shutting down of the



crude distillation unit (CDU) for a few days, PTI reported. Fire at HPCL refinery at Visakhapatnam has been doused. There is no report of any casualty," the

Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas also tweeted.

A fire had broken out at the same plant in 2013, killing more than 20 people at that time.



# Will Covid-19 settle down as a seasonal illness after pandemic ends?

*All pandemics of the past have come to an end. Covid-19 pandemic is unlikely to be any different. Complete elimination of a disease, however, is a debatable medical possibility and a long-drawn-out process.*

(News Agencies)-The only infectious disease to have been entirely eliminated till date, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), is smallpox. It took nearly 200 years after a vaccine was developed to prevent smallpox, caused by a virus.

Covid-19 is a one-and-a-half-year-old disease. Now, scientists are noticing that "immunological characteristics" that "govern the transition of Covid-19" are indicating an "endemicity" of the

coronavirus infection.

The researchers examining the current Covid-19 pandemic trend and comparing it with past pandemics are of the view that the coronavirus infection may become endemic, and end as a seasonal illness.

They have developed a model to predict the outcome of the Covid-19 pandemic. The success of the model depends a lot on how efficiently vaccination drives are undertaken worldwide and also on the behavioural containment

practices adopted by the public and government agencies.

"Our analysis of immunological and epidemiological data on endemic human coronaviruses (HCoVs) shows that infection-blocking immunity wanes rapidly but that disease-reducing immunity is long-lived," the researchers said.

"Our model, incorporating these components of immunity, recapitulates both the current severity of SARS-CoV-2 infection and the benign nature of HCoVs,



suggesting that once the endemic phase is reached and primary exposure is in childhood, SARS-CoV-2 may be no more virulent than the common cold," the scientists said.

This prediction of Covid-19 reducing in effect to an illness like common cold is based on the evidence of past pandemics. The 1918 Spanish Flu pandemic that is often compared with the current Covid-19 pandemic had become endemic after two years.

The H2N2 pandemic of 1952, the

H3N2 pandemic of 1968 and the H1N1 pandemic of 2009 too saw transitions to endemic stages. Interestingly, none of these pandemics needed rollout of vaccines for them to come to an end.

Also, none of these pandemics attained herd immunity - that has been so much talked about during Covid-19 - before turning endemic. This gives hope that Covid-19 pandemic too would become less infectious and troublesome with time, and body's immune system would learn to fight off pathogens either

## Chief Justice Cited Rule That Eliminated Government Choices For CBI Chief: Sources

(Insider Bureau)-At a meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi last evening to select the new chief of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), Chief Justice of India NV Ramana emphasised a rule that eliminated from the race at least two government choices, sources say. After a 90-minute meeting, the high-powered selection panel of PM Modi, the Chief Justice and opposition leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury zeroed in on three names - former Maharashtra Director General Of Police Subodh Kumar Jaiswal, Director General of Sashastra Seema Bal

(SSB) KR Chandra and Home Ministry Special Secretary VSK Kaumudi. Subodh Kumar Jaiswal, the senior most, is reportedly the frontrunner.

Sources say during the discussions Chief Justice Ramana raised a "six-month rule", which has never been cited before in the selection of a CBI director. Justice Ramana referred to a Supreme Court judgement that had said officers with less than six months left in service should not be considered for police chief posts. The selection panel must comply with the law, he said, according to

sources. Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, on the panel as the leader of the largest opposition party Congress, backed the rule, giving it majority support in the three-member committee.

## 555 Students Found In Gujarat Coaching Centre Raid, Owner Arrested

(Insider Bureau)-A coaching centre owner in Jasdan town of Gujarat's Rajkot district was arrested for allegedly breaking COVID-19 norms after police found more than 550 students in his premises during a raid, the police said on Monday. The raid on the centre took place on Sunday and its owner, identified as 39-year-old Jaysukh Sankhalva, was arrested on Monday, said Rajkot Superintendent of Police Balam Meena. "He was arrested under IPC and Epidemic Diseases Act provisions for disobeying police notification on COVID-19 norms as well as for negligent act which may spread infection. The children have been handed over to their parents," he said. According to the police,

Sankhalva runs a coaching centre-cum-hostel to provide training to students appearing for Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya and Balachadi Sainik School entrance exams.

"Based on a tip off, we raided the premises and found 555 students between the age of 9-10 taking tuition. These children were not wearing masks nor was social distancing being maintained. The centre was functioning despite the state government's ban on classroom teaching due to the COVID-19 outbreak," Jasdan police station sub inspector JH Sisodiya said. Before his arrest, Sankhalva told reporters the students were staying in his hostel since May 15 with parental consent.



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# In the post-pandemic world, we must prioritise people Bangladesh beats India on per capita income in FY21

The current pandemic has offered mankind another opportunity to mend its ways. The first warning shot was the seminal work done by the "Club of Rome" in 1972. The forum realised that the human species, unlike other living beings, was consuming not for its needs but for its greed. It concluded that if humanity continues on this manic path, it will destroy mother earth. It captured the results of its scientific analysis in a seminal publication - Limits to Growth. The insights from this work informed the many successive UN Summits on environment and development issues that led to the global adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals by the leaders of 193 nations in 2015. What do we need to do now?

The political leadership of the world must henceforth place the wellbeing of people and the productivity of nature at the core of their post-Covid-19 economic recovery plans. This is the quickest and surest way to revive the health of our fellow citizens, speed up revitalisation of our economies, and accelerate job creation.

Beyond the current pandemic, our world faces many deeper, more intractable and persistent crises. These range from those manifested locally, such as pervasive poverty and marginalisation, pollution and waste, land-use change, and species/habitat loss; through the national and regional ones, such as deforestation, human and wildlife trafficking, unsustainable trade practices and resource depletion; to the big global issues, such as the threats to the climate, biodiversity and oceans -

and collapsing international financial systems.

There is a growing recognition that the pandemic, like these other challenges, is the consequence of the lopsided value systems and institutional arrangements that underlie our current economic policies and practices. If we return to "business as usual", it is impossible to imagine the world achieving the levels of social justice, resource efficiency and environmental health that our nations are committed to.

To build a new global economy that ensures an equitable and environmentally sustainable future for all, nations, big or small, will have to pay much greater attention to facilitate systemic changes by building up strong civil societies, with research capacities for innovating suitable solutions. To achieve these complex but interlinked goals for a future global order, concurrent actions are therefore necessary.

First, put in place a new kind of global solidarity and international cooperation for restoring the balance between people and nature and to build future resilience against existential threats. Strong new institutional networks and nodal agencies need to be built up at regional and national levels to provide the bridge between global entities such as WHO, FAO, Red Cross/Red Crescent, etc., and local institutions.

Second, ensure that national and global commitments are met with alacrity for net-zero emissions, conservation of biodiversity, resource efficiency, reduction of wastes and pollution and maximise social and economic equity.

## Democrats Ignore the Crime Spike at Their Own Peril

On the anniversary of the death of George Floyd, dozens of gunshots rang out in the middle of the day at George Floyd Square in Minneapolis, forcing reporters and bystanders to duck and cover. The symbolism was unmistakable - the yearlong bout of protest and activism after Floyd's killing has coincided with a surge of urban crime that has made gunplay dismayingly common. Indeed, the intersection where Floyd was killed, now a memorial blocked to vehicular traffic, has become a watchword for mayhem, with frightened delivery drivers steering clear and periodic gun battles. The issue of public safety may be about to play its most significant role in our politics since the mid-1990s, the beginning of a decadeslong decline in crime that steadily eroded its political salience. Donald Trump tried to make law and order a defining issue in 2020, but the rioting he so forcefully denounced was, in most places, too transitory to become an overwhelming issue. He was also in the awkward position of trying to run against disorder as an incumbent rather than a challenger, and his chaotic governing style wasn't a good match for a message

of orderliness. But now, more than a year into a serious crime wave, Democrats should beware - they are fooling themselves if they think they won't be blamed for a rise in violence in Democratic-run cities that clearly, at some level, is a result of police forces feeling beleaguered and overwhelmed. Overall, murder increased by more than 25 percent in the United States last year, the biggest jump in 60 years. Murders jumped nearly 50 percent in New York City. Crime increased 36 percent in Los Angeles. And the story is the same in city after city. Surely, the dislocations of the pandemic have been a factor, but it's also obvious that anti-police agitation has put the cops on their back feet. Exhibit A is Minneapolis. In the fevered days and weeks after the killing of Floyd, the City Council pledged to do away with the police department, among the most outlandishly unachievable and self-destructive promises ever made by an elected body. Of course, it couldn't follow through on it, anymore than it could have followed through on a promise to eliminate traffic lights or municipal snow removal.

In a stunning development, India falls behind Bangladesh on per capita income in the financial year 2020-2021. Even amid pandemic, Bangladesh has emerged as an optimistic economy and crossed the towering neighbour country.

Per capita income is a growth index of a nation. It is measured as the average income earned per person in a geographical region and obtained by dividing a country's national income by its population. Bangladesh's per capita income stands at \$2,227 in fiscal year 2020-2021 if compared to the previous years' \$2064. Bangladesh's growth rate increased by 9 percent, whereas India's per capita income shrank to \$1947 due to pandemic and subsequent nationwide lockdown.

Technically, an average Bangladeshi's income is \$280 higher than that of an average Indian in the present scenario. Incidentally, in 2007, the per capita income of Bangladesh was half of that of India. Bangladesh now surpassed the per-capita income of India in terms of dollars within a gap of fourteen years. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has released the World Economic Outlook in October 2020. The report forecasted that Bangladesh would outshine India in terms of per capita dollar terms in 2020. The news stirred up a significant length of controversy then.

India's then-chief economic advisor, Arvind Subramanian strongly contradicted saying, "Market exchange rates are not applicable for welfare comparisons across the time and countries. They don't seem to reflect domestic inflation and productivity growth. A more reasonable basis is GDP at constant, purchasing power parity exchange rates." He further added that India is ahead of Bangladesh. Despite Covid's more adverse impact in 2020, it is

likely to remain so". In reality, though, his opinion didn't seem to satisfy the actual situation. On the other hand, financial experts believe that Bangladesh's superiority over India regarding per capita income will not sustain for long. The prediction is that India will soon recover its position after the lockdown lifts up. According to an economist working with a foreign financial service firm, said on the condition of anonymity, "It's merely a temporary phenomenon. Bangladesh is more of a destination nation of labour-intensive exports which can't keep on pulling the growth engine faster than India".

Since inception, Bangladesh has been fighting hard with its several socio-economic issues. Still, with proper policies and the government's several development programs, the country elevated its development momentum with excellent speed. Its blooming economy already succeeded its neighbouring countries, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar and India. The United Nations has recommended the graduation of Bangladesh from the category of 'Least Developing Country (LDC)' to Developing Nations. What makes Bangladeshis proud today is that they have left Pakistan far behind - a sort of sweet revenge for the genocide of 1971 where three million of Bengalis died. A quarter of a million women were tortured and dishonoured by the brutal Pakistan army trying to stamp out the Bengali liberation struggle. Bangladesh's PM, Sheikh Hasina has also acknowledged Bangladeshi's feelings and informed to the journalists in a recent interview that her father, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman took the right decision to break away from Pakistan in 1971. Pakistan's per capita income as per the last record is \$1186, which is far lower than that of Bangladesh.

By Susmita Ghosh



ISSN No. 1554 06X

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A Publication of Media Partners Capital, Inc.

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# Governing global platforms

**Actions of social media platforms indicate they believe they can flout the law with impunity. Government must ensure compliance with law.**

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY) has written to Twitter objecting to the "manipulated media" tag attached to the post on the alleged Congress "toolkit" tweet by the BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra. It followed that correct action with an incorrect step by sending the Delhi Police sleuths to the Twitter offices in Delhi and Gurgaon in the time of the pandemic. The reason given for the letter is that since the matter was already under investigation by law enforcement agencies, Twitter could not arbitrarily pass judgement on the validity of a tweet. On the other hand, the police move has come under severe criticism from most corners in that it reeks of intimidation and browbeating Twitter.

In the case of the toolkit expose, one cannot defend either the ruling party or the opposition. The memo shared by the BJP

could be a case of manipulated media and thus propagating fake news or it might not be. That is not the moot point when we look at the latest spat between the government and Twitter. The focus instead should be clearly on three core issues.

First, if Twitter intends to label tweets as a normal course of business, it is time that they show transparency in laying down the process followed by which the said label was arrived at. After all there are multiple fact-checking outfits which might come to different conclusions, which at times might also be biased due to ideological leanings. For instance, AltNews was the platform that initially came out and called the toolkit memo a fake. On the other hand, no other fact-checking outfit has conclusively established that the memo was fake. The question is whether Twitter has a process by which they determine which fact check is more accurate or if they

are conducting their own fact check. In the absence of a transparent and clear process, any attempt to label tweets can only be considered as biased and arbitrary.

The second issue is part of a larger debate happening globally and revolves around social media intermediaries evading responsibility for content posted on a platform by claiming to be neutral platforms and on the other hand actively guiding the discourse on the platform through editorial intervention. This is a clear example where Twitter is aggressively violating the neutrality of the platform by pushing one view as manipulated media without sufficient evidence. The question is if the platform is not neutral and is responsible for every bit of content, then why can't the platform be prosecuted for illegal content, for example child sex abuse material which abounds in dark corners of the platform?



Even without defending or questioning the tweet by the BJP spokesperson, it is important to clearly communicate to the platform that it cannot have its cake and eat it too. If the platform wants indemnity from content posted on it, it cannot act in an editorial manner, fashioning the message through incremental acts. The third and the most important question is why the government is forced to engage with social media intermediaries on a piecemeal basis and why can't these tech majors be forced to follow the law of the land which has been meticulously laid down. In February this year, the government had instructed

Twitter to take down certain posts and found the same posts visible by the end of the day. It took serious intervention through the MEITY to ensure that Twitter followed the legitimate and legal requests of the government. Similarly, we have recently seen WhatsApp trying to push through a new privacy policy despite pushback from the government. Given that the matter was sub judice and the same policy had been withdrawn in the EU after high-level intervention, it is definitely strange that the Indian government has not yet succeeded despite intervention. Possibly, the weakness in the legal ecosystem is the absence of heavy and punitive financial penalties.

## Fauci, the WHO, and mainstream media lied about COVID origins for more than a year



much winding up. Pretty much every sane person acknowledges at this point that the government of China likely caused the single worst man-made disaster in human history. As if we need more evidence, over the weekend, the Wall Street Journal reported that the first people infected with COVID-19 were probably researchers at the Wuhan Institute of Virology. In November of 2019, three of them were taken to the hospital with symptoms. The Journal did solid reporting, but it wasn't entirely new. Back in January of this year, the State Department issued a fact sheet telling the entire country the same thing.

They said the first COVID patients were not hungry patrons of the local wet market, reckless diners who gorged themselves on pangolin and bats. No, they weren't. The first patients were researchers at the Wuhan Institute of Virology. Clearly, they'd been infected at work, while working on the virus. If you were trying to understand where

COVID came from, and you should be if you want to prevent future pandemics, that State Department in January told you a lot. Yet it was ignored.

In fact on Monday, Tony Fauci himself - the man in charge of our whole response to COVID-19 - told CBS News that he never even heard about the State Department's findings on the Wuhan lab. He had no idea.

In other words, Fauci's own employers, the U.S. government, publicly released compelling evidence that the virus that he has devoted his life to fighting, did not come from the very bio lab that Tony Fauci has sent American tax dollars to fund. Yet somehow Tony Fauci didn't know this. He didn't know it till he read this weekend's Wall Street Journal. It was news to him. Bolt from the sky. Totally new information. Can we really believe that? No, of course, we can't. In fact, we have heard that on or about November 19, 2019, right around the time those Chinese researchers

became the world's first COVID patients, the government of Thailand contacted the CDC and Tony Fauci's office to say its intelligence service had picked up "biological anomalies" around the lab in Wuhan. In other words, there had been a leak. We can't confirm this, though we believe it to be true. We do know that several other allied foreign governments, including the governments of France and Australia, have gathered evidence showing the virus escaped from a Chinese lab. Yet Tony Fauci, who runs the whole thing, didn't know any of this? Come on. Of course he did. Fauci has known from the beginning the virus may very well have come from that lab. Many people have known that. Fauci just lied about it for more than a year. In May of 2020, in an interview with the willing dupes at National Geographic, he told you that, as one of the world's most eminent scientists, there's really no chance COVID-19 was engineered by human hands.

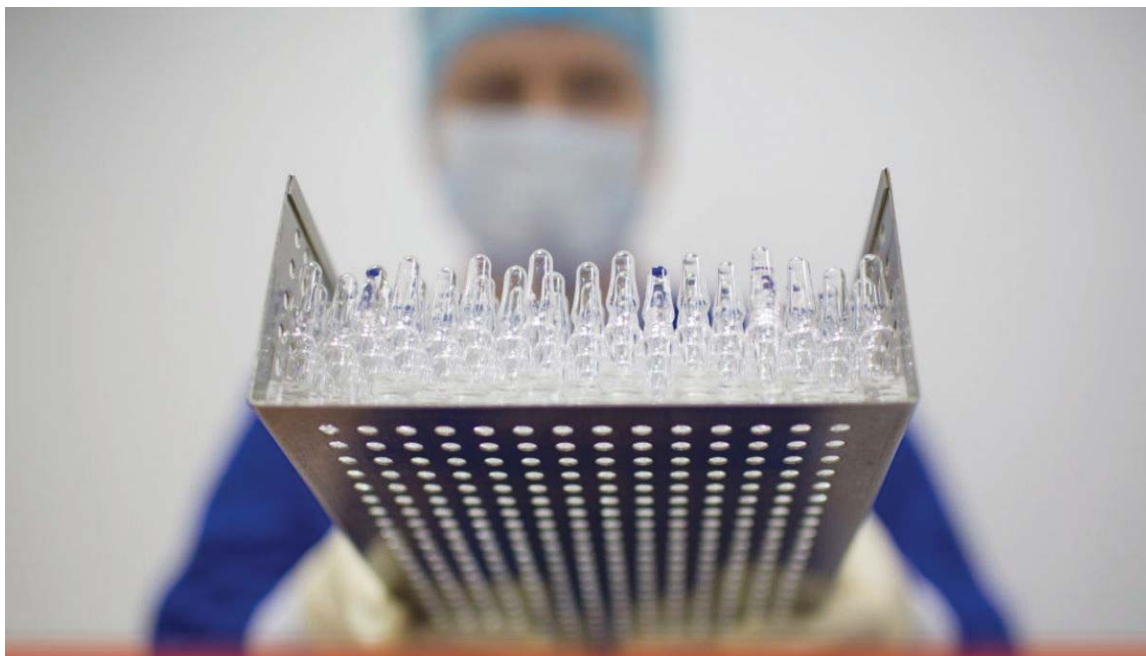
Actually, it looks like this virus did come from a lab in China. Nearly a year and a half into the pandemic, that's the new consensus in the American media. Boy, these things change fast. There are holdouts of course. Just today, over at the Washington Post, a China shill called Michael Gerson wrote a hilariously overwrought column entitled:

"The right is dwelling on slanderous myths about the origins of COVID-19." The radical right! Slanderous myths!

Russian QAnon sleeper cells slandering the Chinese government! It's pretty funny. The good news is, it's almost over. You're probably not going to see a lot more columns like that going forward. The nonsense is finally dying down.

At other parts of Michael Gerson's own newspaper, we've learned, they're working on new stories about how the virus did in fact escape from the lab in Wuhan. So, the debate among serious people over the origins of COVID appears to be pretty





## Get Ready For The Next Wave Of Covid Vaccines

There are more than 10 effective Covid-19 vaccines in use around the world, so it's easy to forget those still in development. That's a mistake. These candidates may be taking longer to arrive, but they're essential to the pandemic fight. Most of the world is still unvaccinated, keeping the virus threat alive, and wherever it is able to spread unchecked there's a risk of variants cropping up that can evade the protection offered by the current crop of shots. Governments need everything they can get and these shots offer the promise of billions of doses of reinforcements.

Of the dozens of vaccine programs in human testing, there are some standouts. Here are four of them, including their status, advantages and challenges.

**Novavax Inc.**

**Status:** U.S.-based Novavax already has positive data in hand from extensive studies of its vaccine in South Africa and the U.K. that show protection against the original virus strain and variants. A large U.S. trial will reveal more data soon. While manufacturing and regulatory holdups pushed back the company's potential regulatory filing from this quarter into the third, the rollout is finally in sight.

**Advantages:** There's solid evidence of efficacy for the shot, which uses tiny proteins to produce an immune response and a booster called an adjuvant to enhance it, and the company

is laying groundwork to make many doses. Novavax made a deal earlier this year to provide a whopping 1.1 billion shots to COVAX, the global procurement platform for low-income countries, on top of agreements with individual countries and licenses for others to make its vaccine.

RNA technology that powers the Pfizer Inc.-BioNTech SE and Moderna Inc. shots - in December. Recruitment is complete and the company hopes to release data and apply for authorization before the end of June.

**Advantages:** The success of the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines have raised



**Challenges:** Most of the COVAX doses will come from the Serum Institute of India, which has delayed exports to focus on India's internal crisis. Also, Novavax's manufacturing efforts have been held up by shortages of things like giant bags used to grow cells and it remains vulnerable to further similar disruptions.

**CureVac NV**

**Status:** The German biotechnology firm started a large late-stage placebo-controlled study of its vaccine - which uses the same type of messenger

RNA technology, and Curevac's version may be a further improvement. The company modifies the RNA molecule differently, which lets it use a smaller dose. That will help it make more vaccines quickly, especially with the help of partnerships it formed with GlaxoSmithKline Plc, Bayer AG, and Novartis AG.

**Challenges:** CureVac must prove that its lower dose provides enough protection. On the supply-chain front, mRNA-focused companies have faced

an extra set of shortages of specialized equipment and ingredients because the technology they're using is newer.

**Valneva SE**

**Status:** The French company launched a unique final stage trial on April 21. Instead of comparing vaccinated people to a group who receive a placebo and tracking illnesses, Valneva's candidate will be tested head-to-head against AstraZeneca Plc's widely used shot in 4,000 people, and the study will measure and compare the immune responses via a blood test. If Valneva's vaccine produces as many neutralizing antibodies as AstraZeneca's, it should theoretically protect against Covid. This approach will produce faster results, and the company hopes to apply for authorization in the fall.

**Advantages:** As others scramble to adapt vaccines to variant strains, Valneva believes that its shot will hold up well from the start. That's because it uses an noninfectious (inactive) whole virus to generate a broader immune response. Many vaccines target just the so-called spike protein of the virus that causes Covid, potentially leaving them more vulnerable to

Sanofi and GlaxoSmithKline Status: The companies intended to begin a definitive trial of a vaccine similar to Novavax's last year. After early results showed it wasn't potent enough, they had to make tweaks. That issue appears resolved; positive data from a new version emerged on May 17, and a placebo-controlled final-stage trial will begin within a few weeks. The companies hope to reach the market in the fourth quarter.

**Advantages:** The combined power of two of the world's biggest vaccine manufacturers is an advantage in its own right. Sanofi already makes a flu shot with the same platform, while Glaxo has years of experience making adjuvant boosters like the one that will be used in the vaccine. Their logistical resources and know-how should mean a rapid rollout upon approval. Delay has also allowed the companies to adapt. They will simultaneously test a formulation aimed at the South African variant and look at whether a lower dose of variant-targeting versions could serve as a booster for those inoculated with other vaccines.

**Challenges:** Placebo-controlled trials are the gold standard, but they're harder to conduct now.

There's little incentive to join a study in which you might not get a vaccine when approved shots are available, so recruitment may prove tricky and must focus on areas without broad access. Valneva may be gambling on blood tests for a quicker result, but Sanofi and Glaxo's conservative approach may prove very time consuming.

These are just a few of the vaccines in the works; there are many more on the way. Sanofi and Glaxo, for instance, are hedging their bets with an mRNA shot and a plant-based vaccine from Medicag, respectively, and the latter recently reported promising mid-stage data. Other developers hope to improve delivery: Vaxart Inc. is working on a tablet, and companies including Altimmune Inc. want to vaccinate with nasal sprays. With continued support, perhaps in the form of government effort to shore up supply chains or guidance on comparative trials, not to mention some good luck, this next wave can get the world from scarcity to abundance and a step closer to putting the pandemic behind us.

**Challenges:** Other efforts using inactive viruses such as the shot developed by China's Sinovac Biotech Ltd. have had less than stellar results. Additionally, the comparative trial may not sit well with regulators. There have been advances in understanding the immune response to Covid, and there's precedent for such studies in other diseases. But it's a bold way to try for initial approval. Valneva plans to conduct additional complementary tests and may need them.





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# One Among Nature: Protecting Our Ecosystems

As Shweta Hule ferries tourists across the beautiful Mandavi creeks of Vengurla, amid the lush green canopy of mangroves, she points out specific mangrove species, mentions their scientific names and explains their importance with precision to the tourists in her boat. "These are not just kandal (Marathi word for mangroves), we know them all by names, as if they are our relatives and friends," she says. This is the kind of harmonious relationship that exists between mangroves and the local communities in Sindhudurg district of Maharashtra. Shweta is one of the many members of the Swamini Self Help Group (SHG), organized as part of the Sindhudurg project for coastal and marine conservation. In 2017, the group was given two row boats, twenty life jackets and trainings on mangrove interpretation and hospitality by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). This was done in collaboration with the Mangrove Cell, Maharashtra Forest Department, and funded by the Global Environment Facility.

The support led to the mangrove safari programme along the creek and the setting up of a makeshift restaurant that serves local cuisine. The initiative has turned the location into a major ecotourism hub and was declared a success model by the forest department. It has also empowered the women to share



their local culture and relationship with nature with both international and national tourists. Last year, their efforts came to a standstill when the Covid-19 pandemic began spreading in India, but the SHG has managed to recover slightly this year with the economy reopening.

Today, as we face a global climate crisis, I feel there is so much we can learn from local communities and their close relationships with nature. It is also a reminder that the way forward lies in an inclusive approach, one that includes working with local communities, respecting traditional knowledge, and embracing diverse perspectives to catalyze change as we work towards protecting and restoring our ecosystems.

With a forest cover of 25 per cent

and diverse coastline of more than 8,000 kilometers, India is home to a wide range of ecosystems. But climate change, illegal mining, unsustainable tourism and farming practices, and commercial exploitation are leading to land degradation and biodiversity loss. Let us consider, for example, the mangrove ecosystems which are home to a rich and diverse flora and fauna. These are called the 'lungs of cities' for their immense oxygen content, and 'shields during cyclones' for their capacities to protect the coastlines during natural calamities. The mangroves are also a huge source of alternative income for fisherfolk who largely depend on the ecosystem for their sustenance during seasonal bans when they cannot fish in the high seas. Despite their value,

mangrove ecosystems are one of the most threatened ecosystems. Illegal felling of trees, production activities, and pollution are ruining the mangroves and adversely impacting the communities reliant on them. For a traditionally nature dependent country like India, where agriculture and its allied sectors constitute a major source of livelihood for over 70 percent of its rural population and where fishing constitutes a main source of employment for over 14.5 million people, it is extremely important to lead restoration programmes and take steps towards inclusive conservation measures. While policy makers and enforcement agencies play a crucial role in implementing regulatory measures, individually, we all have an important role in

improving our relationship with nature and ensuring the protection of our ecosystems.

How can we protect our ecosystems?

Once during a visit to Goa, I remember taking a boat ride and experiencing up close the beauty of the mangrove forests situated along the Mandovi river. While the sheer greenery of the forests and the variety of wildlife impressed me, I was also disappointed to see plastics and other waste materials floating along the river because of careless human activities. Such unsustainable tourist activities can be replaced by both ecotourism efforts as well as responsible initiatives at the individual level. We must understand that all our choices have large-scale implications, and nature-based and nature conscious alternatives in all areas of our lives are the way forward for a sustainable future. The planet we have inherited is one with beautiful, resourceful and nurturing ecosystems and we are obliged to preserve it for our future generations.

We live in a world where we are accountable for our actions, as individuals, communities and societies. Individual mindful actions and choices, and an integrated approach are the future for both ecological preservation and restoration. And like the women of Vengurla, this starts from not just working with nature but being one with nature.

## In Myanmar, a coup-induced crisis

**Nearly 15,000 people from Myanmar have entered India since February, a Mizoram government official told Reuters on Tuesday**

Nearly 15,000 people from Myanmar have entered India since February, a Mizoram government official told Reuters on Tuesday. More are expected to enter, as the fighting between the military regime and insurgents intensifies. On March 10, the Centre sent a note to Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh, asking them to stop the influx and deport anyone who managed to get in. However, Mizoram's chief minister,

Zoramthanga, said that his government would take a humanitarian approach. This was not surprising; communities in the region share deep cultural and ethnic ties across the political border. For Delhi, the coup in Myanmar presented a dilemma, since it was torn between its values (which would require standing with democracy) and interests (which would require working with the military). But it is quite clear that this distinction

doesn't hold, for Myanmar's undemocratic turn is clearly impinging on Indian interests — including its connectivity efforts and security interests. Domestically, New Delhi's stance on the conflict-generated migrants can also impact Centre-state relations, especially in a sensitive region such as the Northeast. To be sure, India is not under any legal obligation to provide shelter because it is not a party to the 1951 UN Refugee



Convention and its 1967 Protocol. The lack of a formal legal framework, domestically and internationally, has allowed India to follow an ad hoc approach on conflict-generated migrants, depending on their salience in

domestic politics and the larger public mood. However, the customary principle of non-refoulement prohibits any State from deporting an individual back to a country where they face a threat.



# From Belarus, a threat to global media freedom

***Across the world, illiberal regimes have found new ways to exert pressure on the media - from directly threatening the lives of journalists to deploying more subtle forms of pressure***

On Sunday, Belarus's government, under its authoritarian leader, Aleksandr G Lukashenko, in an audacious move, warned an airline passing through its skies that it faced a bomb threat. It then sent a military jet to get the plane to land in Belarus's capital, Minsk. No bomb was found, and it turned out that the objective was never to secure the plane. It was to arrest a passenger, a dissident journalist, Roman Protasevich, who was picked up by authorities and taken

into custody. Across the world, illiberal regimes have found new ways to exert pressure on the media - from directly threatening the lives of journalists to deploying more subtle forms of pressure. But Belarus's action, supported by Russia, is outrageous by any standards. Mr Protasevich, an editor of a Telegram channel, one of the few platforms where criticism of the regime can still be articulated, was living in exile in Lithuania and now stares at the possibility of 12 years in prison.

The arrest violates the letter and spirit of the universal declaration of human rights; the "apparent forced landing", is, according to the International Civil Aviation Organization, a violation of the Chicago Convention which governs international aviation; and European leaders and the United States have strongly condemned the move, with governments terming it variously as "state hijacking", "act of state terrorism", "abhorrent", and calling for a unified response. To India, this



may appear like a distant development where it has little at stake. But as a democracy, committed to the rule of law and press freedom, India must speak up against Belarus's action. The international community, especially democracies, the

international aviation industry, and all global human rights organisations need to come together to ensure that Mr Lukashenko is not allowed to set a precedent or get away with this shocking assault on global media freedom.

## I'm A Lawyer For Cairn. Here's Where India Went Wrong

I must start with a disclaimer: I'm one of the lawyers representing Cairn Energy. But this is not about the proceedings initiated by India to set aside the US\$ 1.25 billion arbitral award or even about the proceedings initiated against Air India in the US to seek to recover this amount. This article is about the curious adventures of Cairn Energy in India and why they highlight the best and worst that India has to offer.

### Cairn's Expansion in India

Cairn began oil and gas exploration and development activities in India in 1996. A series of acquisitions enabled Cairn to make huge discoveries, including of oil fields in Rajasthan which currently account for roughly a quarter of India's entire domestic oil production.

By 2006, the Cairn Energy group's remarkable success in India raised the possibility of gathering all Indian operations and assets under a single Indian entity, Cairn India, and offering shares to the public. The resulting capital increase would allow further investment in Rajasthan and other locations in India.

What followed was the largest IPO in India; it raised nearly US\$ 1.98 billion in January 2007. Cairn's India subsidiary, Cairn India, became one of India's top 25 listed companies by market capitalisation.

so far, so good.

### Vodafone and the Tax Dispute

In January 2012, the UK-based Vodafone Group won a seminal



case in the Supreme Court against the Income Tax Department which had asked the telecom to pay over Rs 19,000 crore as capital gains tax (and penalty) for a transaction that had been completed five years earlier. In 2007, Vodafone had acquired a Cayman company from Hutchison. This Cayman company, together with certain Indian entities, ultimately held a 67 per cent stake in Hutchison Essar Limited, the Indian telecom company. The shares acquired by Vodafone were those of a foreign company, but this was the first time the Income Tax Department sought to tax transfers of shares of a foreign company on the basis that this Cayman company derived its value from Indian assets. An indirect transfer of Indian assets had occurred, the Income Tax Department claimed.

Until then, only transfers of shares of an Indian company were subject to capital gains tax in India. Vodafone alleged that high-ranking tax officials publicly acknowledged that the Income Tax Department's tax of capital gains arising from the Hutchison-Vodafone transaction was a "test case".

The Vodafone case attracted considerable international attention. On February 5, 2010, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh wrote to his UK counterpart, Gordon Brown, assuring him that Vodafone would "have the full protection of the law" and indicating his understanding that "there is no retrospective application of taxation and a recent court judgment has affirmed this position".

On January 20, 2012, the Supreme Court issued a decision

in Vodafone's favour and had re-established order; justice had prevailed - or so we thought. But just two months later, the Finance Ministry amended the Income Tax Act, 1961 to provide that transfers of shares of foreign companies that substantially derived their value from assets situated in India were subject to tax in India. They did this with retrospective effect.

In 2014, the BJP assumed power in India. Its election manifesto criticised the preceding government for having unleashed "tax terrorism" and "uncertainty", which "negatively impact[ed] the investment climate". In his first budget speech, the new Finance Minister, Arun Jaitley, stated that "[t]his Government will not ordinarily bring about any change retrospectively which

creates a fresh liability". A new committee was formed which would decide whether action could be taken in new cases identified for retrospective taxes. In a television interview a few months later (which also featured the former Finance Minister, P. Chidambaram), the Finance Minister admitted that it was not on his immediate agenda to repeal the controversial amendment; however, he insisted that "even though there is a sovereign power of retrospective taxation, we are not going to exercise that power."

This view was confirmed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on February 14, 2016. The Prime Minister was quoted in February 2016 by the Financial Times as saying that the government "will not resort to retrospective taxation; we are making our tax regime transparent, stable and predictable".

Back to Cairn Energy  
Between 2009 and 2010, Cairn Energy sold much of its shareholding in its Indian business to third parties. The most significant transaction was the sale of a controlling stake in Cairn India to Vedanta. This was completed in December 2011. Cairn Energy ultimately sold 40 per cent of Cairn India's issued share capital. The off-market portion of the sale was subject to capital gains tax in India because it involved the private sale of shares in an Indian company.



# When the pandemic hits the highest peak

**While one can appreciate Nepal's economic and domestic compulsions, opening up Everest this season - and keeping it open - is not just risky for mountaineers, but also other citizens**

A coronavirus outbreak on Mount Everest has infected at least 100 climbers and support staff, according to a report by Associated Press on Sunday. Lukas Furtenbach, an expedition organiser, said there were at least "100 people minimum positive for Covid in base camp, and then the numbers might be something like 150 or 200." Other climbers have talked about the presence of only rapid antigen testing facilities at the base camp and the lack of adherence to protocols such as social distancing. While international climbers are required to take the RT-PCR test on arrival in Kathmandu, this isn't uniformly followed. And there is no protocol for testing Nepali support staff. This means that



Covid-19-positive climbers and staff may be mingling with others throughout the trek. The climbing

season ends on May 29.

Mountain tourism is an important part of Nepal's economy, and

Everest climbers alone contribute more than \$300 million to the country. Last year, Nepal was

forced to cancel all climbing expeditions, including those to Everest, due to Covid-19, leading to a strain on the economy and livelihood loss for the support staff. To offset these losses, Nepal issued a record 408 permits for Everest this season; an additional 125 permits have been issued for Lhotse, which uses the same base camp.

While one can appreciate Nepal's economic and domestic compulsions, opening up Everest this season - and keeping it open - is not just risky for mountaineers, but also other citizens. Nepal is already facing an unprecedented surge of cases, severely straining a weak health care system. It is time to climb down from the peak.

# On Twitter, a self-goal

**On Monday night, two teams of the special cell of Delhi Police "visited" the offices of Twitter India in Delhi and Gurugram**

On Monday night, two teams of the special cell of Delhi Police "visited" the offices of Twitter India in Delhi and Gurugram. The objective was to ostensibly give a notice to the company, and seek an explanation for why it tagged a tweet by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) spokesperson, Sambit Patra, as "manipulated media". The tweet in question concerns a "toolkit", outlining how the government can be cornered for its management of the pandemic. The BJP has claimed that this is a Congress party document, which shows how the Opposition is cynically leveraging a human tragedy. The Congress has rejected the allegation, acknowledged that parts of it were genuine while alleging the more controversial parts were fake, and filed a police complaint for forgery. AltNews, a fact-checking site, based on a study of the metadata, has corroborated the Congress's version, and there has been no



evidence forthcoming on the entire document's authenticity. Twitter then tagged the tweet as "manipulated" (which means the media in question was altered). There is the larger question on whether Twitter's action of taking such calls affects its status as an intermediary. It does, after all,

look like an editorial call that a media company may make. Stung by Twitter's decision, the government, which wrote to the company, seems to have decided it was time to have the police pay the company offices a "visit", initially presented as a "raid". Twitter's offices have been

closed for a year, and there are multiple channels of communication that already exist between the government and Twitter. As a result, Delhi Police's action has reinforced the impression of democratic backsliding in India, where contesting the narrative of the

ruling party can invite retribution. It has done little to establish the authenticity of the "toolkit". It has blurred the line between the party's objectives and the State's conduct. It has distorted the debate on regulation of big tech, which requires a careful balance between freedom and accountability. It has put the ministry of external affairs in a spot, for the job of defending India's actions against a big tech firm headquartered in the US will end up falling on external affairs minister, S Jaishankar, currently on a visit to that country. There is a simple lesson in all of this for authorities concerned - stay focused on the goal of beating the pandemic, fight political wars without involving State agencies, use existing channels to communicate with tech firms without resorting to intimidation, and remember each action will be carefully weighed on the scale of democratic conduct.



# A majority of Republicans are living in a fantasy world built around the Big Lie



Party. Trump has kept up the drumbeat of falsehoods -- feeding the lie. Why aren't Minority Leader Mitch McConnell and Republicans doing anything about what went on in the 2020 Election," he asked on Monday. "How can the Democrats be allowed to get away with this? It will go down as the Crime of the Century!" To which Republicans -- as they have for months and months -- said nothing. Because they are afraid of Trump and their own base. And have prioritized their own political interests -- Kevin McCarthy wants to be speaker, for example -- over the broader interests of the party and the country. Now, before we go any further, let's just take a minute to note that there is clear and demonstrable evidence that directly contradicts what a majority of Republican say they believe about the 2020 election. "To date, we have not seen fraud on a scale that could have effected a different outcome in

the election," said Trump administration Attorney General Bill Barr late last year. The man who succeeded Barr in the job -- acting Attorney General Jeffrey Rosen -- said the same in testimony to Congress earlier this month. "During my tenure, DOJ maintained the position publicly announced previously that the Department had been presented with no evidence of widespread voter fraud at a scale sufficient to change the outcome of the 2020 election," he said. Trump and his legal team filed dozens of cases -- in state and federal courts -- alleging widespread voter fraud. They won not a single significant victory. The Supreme Court rejected a suit to overturn the Pennsylvania results and a broader effort led by Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton that aimed to invalidate votes in several key swing states that went for Biden. Against all of these facts are Trump's random musings -- and a group of party leaders unwilling

to acknowledge that he is, objectively, wrong. The unwillingness by Republicans to stand up on principle -- and to put their own personal political interests aside -- has created an environment in which more than half of their voters believe the Big Lie. And with Trump making no move to step off the national scene, you can bet that these voters will get plenty more rhetoric to fuel their false beliefs in the coming months and years. It's not an overstatement to say that the Republican Party is currently organized around a lie. And what's worse is that the vast majority of GOP leaders know that Trump is lying -- and are just too afraid to tell their own voters the truth. This cowardice will have clear consequences not just for the Republican Party but for the country as a whole. And sets up a scenario for 2024 that could make the 2020 election and its aftermath look like a walk in the park.

In order to have a functioning democracy in America, we need to have the two major political parties willing to agree on a basic set of facts -- starting with who won the 2020 election.

According to a new national poll from Reuters/Ipsos, we don't have that. Consider these data points:

\* Fully 53% of Republicans in the poll said that Donald Trump was the "true" president while 47% said Joe Biden, who is the actual president.

\* Another 56% of Republicans

say that the results of the 2020 election were "the result of illegal voting or election rigging."

\* More than 6 in 10 GOPers either "strongly" (39%) or "somewhat" (22%) agreed with the statement that the 2020 election "was stolen from Donald Trump."

Those numbers are remarkable. Scary. Depressing. And reflective of the fact that the Big Lie pushed by Trump and his allies -- and aided and abetted by the silence of the vast majority of Republican leaders -- has taken significant root in the Republican

# Let this be the last Israel-Gaza ceasefire



Egypt worked around the clock over the past two weeks to end the deadly fighting between our Palestinian and Israeli neighbors. Since the early hours of the conflict, Egyptian mediators led de-escalation talks with both Hamas and Israeli leadership. We supported humanitarian efforts on the ground, including by opening the Rafah border crossing for the provision of immediate medical care to the injured in Gaza. Ultimately, in close partnership with the United States and others, we were able to broker a ceasefire. On Thursday, President Joe Biden called Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi

and reiterated the vital role mutual coordination between the US and Egypt can have in the region; Egypt will spare no resource in bringing about peace there, whenever violence erupts. This was true during the 2014 war, when we were instrumental in forging a truce. It was true during the conflict this May. And it will be true at any point in the future.

However, we will also never accept the notion that this cycle of bloodshed is inevitable. That is why we refuse to let this issue recede in international priorities -- as it has in the past -- until the next crisis emerges and imposes.

Building a lasting solution must start now. Egypt is ready to do

everything to help negotiate a lasting peace to the core conflict in the Middle East. We are calling on the US to work with us to restart that process immediately.

Egypt's historic role in planting the seeds of peace, our substantive contributions toward a Middle East peace plan, our proximity to the conflict, and the direct ramifications of belligerency to our nation, all make Egypt singularly positioned to help restart negotiations toward a two-state solution between Palestinians and Israelis -- and with the full span of their rights upheld; prime amongst them is statehood to the Palestinians and security to the Israelis. But we need sustained international efforts.

Working together, Egypt and the US can broker an honest and open dialogue with Israel on concrete steps it should take to work towards peace, such as refraining from taking any further steps detrimental to the wellbeing of the population and the status of the city of Jerusalem, which was occupied by Israel since the 1967 War.

In turn, Cairo and Washington must impress on Palestinians the need to work for peace. While having the militants lay down their arms for good might seem a long way off, stopping further attacks is essential to move forward. Those factions rejecting peace efforts and seeking instability, whatever their name or affiliation is, have to be contained, including by undermining their international network of support and finance. After all, armed attacks and military operations, whatever their cause is, never serve the path towards peace and only sets back the ultimate objective of a two state solution.

We must work to uphold and enable the Palestinian National Authority. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority, has a crucial role in furthering any future peace negotiations. His role as a national leader has been overshadowed by Hamas' recent conflict with Israel, yet he has all the credentials and willingness to return to the table for serious and meaningful discussions. Elevating Abbas in the eyes of the world will

bring him back into his historic role as chief negotiator for the Palestinian people; after all, no one on the Palestinian side has worked more on the vision of a two state solution than President Abbas.

A strong and lasting peace in the Middle East may seem far off given the recent heightened tensions in the West Bank, including Jerusalem, and Gaza, but that should still be the goal for the US, Egypt and, most importantly, Israelis and the Palestinians.

We must continue to march forward toward peace, or we risk continuing to suffer with this vicious cycle of despair and bloodshed.

The continued partnership between Egypt and the United States in peace efforts is a crucial cornerstone to achieving peace in the Middle East. It is indeed no coincidence that the latest ceasefire was declared mere hours after President Biden called President Al-Sisi. When it comes to giving peace a chance in the Middle East, Washington and Cairo must continue to work together as peacemakers and arbiters.



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# Why Modi's Tears Scare The Opposition



mainstream media bats for the Modi government. Even those who don't are ruled by the decorum of journalism, which requires them to report the PM's tears as unembellished facts. So, some report it as a 'tearful tribute', other say 'the PM fights back tears'. News media's reach is crucial for the BJP to present the PM as an empathetic being who is moved to tears by the sufferings of the people he serves.

This is what scares the opposition. Narendra Modi continues to be the tallest political figure in India. There is no doubt that the government's bewildered incompetence has affected the PM's popularity; opinion polls suggest that his approval ratings are at the lowest in seven years. Yet, the opposition has learnt the hard way that Modi is brilliant at winning back people's trust very quickly.

Modi's silence throughout much of the killer second-wave had opened up a door for the opposition to portray Modi as a heartless Nero. The PM's image-managers responded by trying to

build a narrative of 'positivity'. This was an unfortunate choice, since it could easily be countered with puns about being COVID- 'positive'. In fact, the BJP's sermons about looking for happiness and light in the middle of mass misery made the PM look even more uncaring. For the first time since 2014, the fight over political messaging was being lost by the ruling party.

The opposition knew that Modi crying on camera could turn the initiative back in the BJP's favour. That is why it was prepared to deal with it. "Crocodile tears" was the first weapon. It has now moved to memes contrasting "PM Cares" and "PM Cries". In some ways, it mirrors the BJP and Sangh-ecosystem's consistent stigmatization of Rahul Gandhi as "Pappu". They too know that Rahul is the only pan-Indian challenger to Modi's throne. So, it is absolutely essential to constantly hammer into the voter's mind that Rahul is a bumbling, immature imbecile. The Congress is responding now by presenting Modi as a heartless, uncaring, vote-hungry tyrant.

The opposition is currently ruling the social media narrative. But it also knows that public mind is most deeply influenced by mainstream media. A tweet with very heavy engagement might reach a couple of million people, whereas a normal Hindi news bulletin at 9 PM routinely reaches five times that many viewers. How newsrooms curate and package events determine what most voters will think. Even when voters react negatively to the way TV debates approach a political subject, the agenda has already been set for them, by the binaries presented by the two sides of the debate.

I have argued in the past that Rahul Gandhi and the Congress need to open doors towards India Inc to indirectly re-establish themselves within mainstream media. Many large networks are corporate-owned today, and others are heavily dependent on big ticket advertisers to survive. If advertisers, sponsors and owners are inimical to Rahul's politics, then it will be very difficult for the national opposition to find its voice heard in the TV studios or headlined on front-pages.

When a crocodile eats its prey, it actually sheds tears. Not that it feels bad for its kill. It is simply that when it chomps on its food, it hisses a lot. That pushes warm air through its sinuses, triggering the tear-glands into action. Although the science behind it was worked out only recently, crocodile tears have been observed for centuries. And they have entered our lexicon to mean insincere, fake tears.

So, when PM Modi shed a few drops for India's frontline health workers, the internet exploded with "crocodile tears" memes, jokes, quips and hashtags. It was almost as if the opposition's cyber-warriors were ready for it. In fact, even before the event, some anti-Modi handles on

social media had been asking whether India will "forgive" the PM if he came and wept on camera. The question is why does the opposition fear Modi's tears? The most important reason is that the BJP is dominant in the domain of public discourse. Words, actions, events, acquire significance only within a field of other connected meanings. The same thunderbolt can be seen as an act-of-god or a natural phenomenon, depending on the field of signs and meanings that an observer occupies. The PM's tears will also be understood and internalized by voters, based on the way in which that specific action is communicated to them. It is no secret that a large and influential section of India's

## Don't Blame Covid Crisis on the "System" and "Elites"

The massive scale of illness and deaths caused by the mighty second Covid wave has prioritized both the need and the desire to understand the causes of this wave, the severe inadequacy of treatment and the horrific number of deaths. As a consequence, we are now flooded with all kinds of theories which range from the weird (5G towers and more) and deceitful to the naive.

Many naive analyses pin the responsibility for the crisis on the "system", as if it were some autonomous machine; some blame evil, entrenched "elites". A recent piece in The Indian Express blames "an outdated administrative system" and a "knowledge elite" for failing to tackle the Covid surge.

It is indeed true that routine failures in the established bureaucracy are commonplace in every crisis. Vast sections of this officialdom are

dysfunctional, riven by petty corruption, and manned with staff with low levels of competence, commitment and empathy. Public institutions are terribly underfunded and under-staffed - most of these offices with a non-existent or barely-maintained infrastructure. Walk into a public hospital in any city, especially outside the metros, and the appallingly decrepit ethos will hit you in the face. But it is incredibly naive to say that it is an "administrative system" to blame. It is political, policy-defining entities who should be held responsible for having allowed such a "system" to come to pass over decades. At every point of time, the "system" has been owned and operated by those holding the reigns of power.

Similarly, it defies all logic how the current Covid crisis can be attributed to the apparent villainy of some "knowledge elite" which has apparently monopolized and

hoarded knowledge. This "elite" seems to refer to the "3,000 eminent scientists and professors in our elite institutions".

Scientists have spoken out - though one can question whether those who are close to the governments of the day have spoken enough truth to power. However, it is equally true that bureaucracies have political masters, and in this country, they have little professional autonomy; scientists can find themselves similarly trapped, especially when it comes to policy matters.

A common trope of the "it-is-the-system-to-blame" analysis is to lament how well "other systems work compared to ours". For instance, it is observed that the website of the Centre for Disease Control (CDC) in the US provides Covid statistics in great detail whereas "none of these clinical facts are known for India". This is grossly incorrect - abundant data is hosted by various government



websites (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare - MoHFW, Indian Council of Medical Research - ICMR) though it certainly is not that well-organized or analysed. However, the real problem is that data collection and storage is centralized, by design, with the ICMR, which has been rather unwilling to share it with the broader scientific community. So much so that scientists have petitioned the Prime Minister for this data to be made accessible to them. Therefore, if such data

has not been researched well enough, the fault lies with those who have instituted this monopoly. Of even greater importance is the unreliable quality of official data related to the numbers of Covid cases and deaths, and the failure of governments to ensure data integrity. The media reports (1, 2, 3) everyday of the mismatch (1, 2) between the official figure of deaths and that observed at crowded cremation locales.





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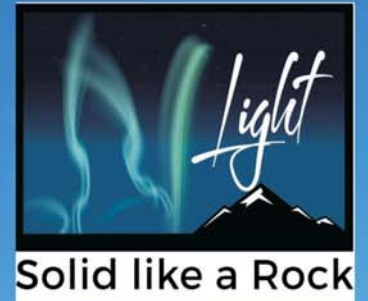
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# End the farm agitation, now

***Instead of intensifying protests, it would be wiser to use the six-month landmark to move beyond the politics of agitation.***

Last week, the Samyukta Kisan Morcha, representing a set of farm unions, wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It placed the onus of resuming dialogue to end the farm agitation on him, while sticking to its demand for the repeal of farm laws and a legal guarantee of minimum support prices (MSP). On Saturday, agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar said that the unions should either accept the government's offer to suspend the farm laws for 18 months or come up with an alternative proposal for talks to resume, and again rejected the demand for the repeal of laws. May 26 marks six months of the farm agitation. The movement is a classic example of how a grassroots struggle can lose its way because of rigidity and the absence of sound political leadership. It succeeded in bringing issues of India's political



economy, especially the transition in agriculture, to the forefront; it raised genuine questions about the process through which farm laws were pushed through in Parliament; it represented a moment of mass assertion in politics and pushed the government onto the defensive; and it drew

international solidarity.

But farm leaders failed to capitalise on their own political success. On January 26, elements within the movement turned violent, tarring India's Republic Day celebrations. The unions refused to acknowledge that the government was willing to introduce a set of amendments

to address their concerns, not wholly but substantially. They did not take up the government's reasonable offer of the suspension of laws - an 18-month suspension effectively means the laws are unlikely to come into force during the term of the current Lok Sabha. They imposed impossible demands such as a

legal guarantee for MSP, which will have inflationary consequences. And most fatally, they have continued mass protests even as the second wave has devastated lives in Delhi, Punjab, Haryana and west UP - and these political congregations would have played a role in spreading the infection, putting at risk the lives of farmers, their families, community, and society at large. With the Centre reiterating that its offer is on the table, the farm unions must accept the 18-month suspension of laws, end their agitation, explain to their own base why maximalism won't work, focus on the pandemic, and engage in consultations to improve the legal framework over the next year-and-a-half. Instead of intensifying protests, it would be wiser to use the six-month landmark to move beyond the politics of agitation.

## Twitter - The Judge, The Jury And The Executioner



***Twitter ceases to be an intermediary platform as soon as it censors posts. And once it does this, it becomes accountable for all other posts on its platform***

The natural justice process can be split into three components-- the office of the judge, the jury or equivalent, and the institution that executes the punishment. The reason these roles are kept separate, is to avoid any conflict of interest and transgression of justice. If all three roles are done by the same entity, it is referred to as a "Kangaroo Court".

With the muscle flexing of the digital monopolies that I have been warning about in my articles and lectures for over a decade and a half, we see digital monopolies becoming The

Judge, The Jury and The Executioner - that is, morphing into a giant Kangaroo Court. Completely nonchalant about local laws, local government and local sensitivities, we have digital monopolies crushing the digital sovereignty of a nation with absolute impunity. Such behaviour is not just limited to the WhatsApps of the world, who, despite the call of the free people of a free country, are going ahead in imposing their "privacy policy", which should be more appropriately called the "anti-privacy policy". Such a policy snatches away the dignity

of privacy to one's own data. Even worse, it is largely an India-only policy, a policy for third world economies, which they dare not enforce on say the European Union. We also see the other large digital monopoly, Twitter, conducting quick trials of various posts of various people, and giving "swift" punishment, including banishing them from their monopolistic platforms. In many of my previous articles, I have often gone deep into explaining why a digital monopoly ceases to be a mere private enterprise when it has an extremely large user base, thus transforming into a digital public utility. Thus, the cost of a user not being allowed to be on that public utility is extremely high. Hence it is extremely dangerous for a non-constitutional institution, such as a private digital monopoly, to wield such enormous powers to decide on

the fate of free individuals, and in the process control the narration in society and thereby, also the outcomes of key national processes such as elections. So, what really has Twitter done? Over the last few months, Twitter has been unilaterally deciding to censor people and posts, at its own will. The rules and processes of such censorship has not been made public. Anyhow, a private enterprise should not have the right to exercise such powers on free people. The key actions it took started with banning of former President of USA, Donald Trump from their platform. Although it does not impact Indians, it was a warning of the power that Twitter wields and that Twitter is willing to exercise, with no due process being followed.

No matter how distasteful the tweets are of a person, it is for

the government to take away the right to free speech if it is in violation of the law of the land, and not for a private enterprise to do so. Since the banning of Donald Trump from the Twitter platform, Twitter has actively started censoring people and their posts on their platform in India also. Such steps ranged from censoring and eventually banning Kangana Ranaut, a popular Bollywood actor, to suspending the account of the Lt. Governor of Jammu & Kashmir, to tagging tweets of Dr. Sambit Patra, a senior spokesperson of a national political party, as being "Manipulative". Did Twitter do its due-diligence before taking these steps? Are these steps acceptable to the Indian society at large? Actually, even these are the not the real questions for the given issue.



## Top Pakistan health official doesn't foresee India scenario

(News Agencies)- Pakistan's top health official said Monday the COVID-19 variant that devastated neighboring India, causing record infections and deaths, has not yet been found in Pakistan. Faisal Sultan said Pakistan was still in the middle of a third wave of infections that began earlier this year, flooding hospitals with COVID patients. But he said he hoped the tide of new cases would subside in the coming weeks. "I don't foresee an India-like situation in Pakistan," he told The Associated Press. Pakistan avoided a similar scenario to India because thousands of beds were added to hospitals and the production of oxygen was increased as part of a contingency plan. However, Sultan said that "we are not out of the woods yet" and people should get vaccinated if they want to return to a normal life. His comments came hours after Pakistan



reported one of the lowest single-day death tolls from COVID-19 in recent months, with 57 fatalities. Pakistan has repeatedly expressed grief over the COVID-19 situation in India, where authorities reported 4,454 new deaths in the last 24 hours, bringing India's total fatalities from the virus to 303,720 out of 27 million cases. Pakistan has registered about 903,600 cases and 20,308 confirmed deaths since the pandemic began in early 2020. But the U.S. efforts to solidify plans for what comes next appear to have taken on renewed urgency in recent days, leaning on outreach from the White House and the Pentagon to overcome a decade of strained ties and start to win over Pakistani officials. Already, U.S. officials have voiced some

## With Afghanistan's Future at Stake, US Courts Pakistan

(News Agencies)-More than three weeks into the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, Washington's plans to help ensure the country does not descend into chaos remain murky despite a ramped-up effort to get Afghanistan's neighbors - Pakistan in particular - to do more.

The focus has been on rallying support, both for the ongoing diplomatic push to keep talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban on track, and for military cooperation should instability make new U.S. counterterrorism operations necessary.

But the U.S. efforts to solidify plans for what comes next appear to have taken on renewed urgency in recent days, leaning on outreach from the White House and the Pentagon to overcome a decade of strained ties and start to win over Pakistani officials. Already, U.S. officials have voiced some



optimism that an initial meeting between U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan and his Pakistani counterpart, Moeed Yusuf, on Sunday in Geneva, went well.

"Both sides discussed a range of bilateral, regional, and global issues of mutual interest," according to a statement issued by the White House on Monday, which made no reference to Afghanistan.

"Both sides agreed to continue the conversation," it said.

The Pentagon, likewise, expressed confidence following

a call early Monday between U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff, General Qamar Javed Bajwa.

"The secretary's discussion this morning was very useful," Pentagon press secretary John Kirby told reporters. "The secretary reiterated his appreciation for Pakistan's support for the Afghanistan peace negotiations and expressed his desire to continue to build on the United States-Pakistan bilateral relationship." History of mistrust

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# Covid-19: Pakistan to launch locally-made Chinese vaccine from next week

(News Agencies)-Pakistan's state-run National Institute of Health (NIH) has managed to locally produce the first batch of China-made single-dose coronavirus vaccine CanSino. The locally-made Chinese vaccine has been named, PakVac and the first batch of vaccine would be available for administration by the end of this month, Arya News reported.

Faisal Sultan, a senior health official said that the product has passed rigorous internal testing and said it was an important step to help in Pakistan's vaccine supply line. The official also congratulated the team of the premier health institute of Pakistan for their achievement.



"Congratulations to the NIH Pak team and its leadership for successful fill/finish (from concentrate) of the Cansino vaccine with the help of Cansino Bio Inc. China. The product has passed the rigorous internal QA testing. An important step to help in our vaccine supply line," said Sultan, the Special Assistant to the Prime Minister of Pakistan on National Health Services, Regulations, and Coordination. As many as 124,000 CanSino jabs have been developed and

they would soon be rolled out. In a few days, Pakistan's regulatory and health authority body will examine the vaccine and give a final approval regarding its use. Following that, NHI would be able to produce three million doses per month. As COVID-19 vaccines are unavailable to most of the population in Pakistan due to private sales and higher prices, leading critics believe that the country is making inoculations only for the wealthy.

Two doses of the Sputnik V vaccine cost as high as USD 80, while the monthly income of an average worker in Pakistan is about USD 110. Moreover, tight supplies have created hurdles for vaccine sales

in Pakistan, making them available for only a fraction of the country's population, reported The New York Times. "The Pakistani example is a microcosm of what has gone wrong with the global response -- where wealth alone has primarily shaped who gets access. Ending the pandemic will require the global community to do much more than just that," Zain Rizvi, an expert on medicine access at Public Citizen, an advocacy group in Washington.

# Pakistan: Soldier killed in firefight with Afghan militants

(News Agencies)-Militants in Afghanistan fired across the border at a military post in northwestern Pakistan, killing a soldier in a firefight with Pakistani troops, the military said. The cross-border attack took place in the district of North Waziristan in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province late Saturday night, the military said



in a statement. It said troops returned fire and a young soldier was killed. No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack and the military provided no further details. The statement said Pakistan has consistently asked Afghanistan to manage and control its side of the border. Pakistan strongly condemns the use of Afghan soil by militants

for attacks against targets inside Pakistan. Afghan Defense Ministry deputy spokesman Fawad Aman said there was no "center of terrorism in Afghanistan" and that almost all militant groups fighting in Afghanistan have bases in Pakistan. "Terrorists are entering Afghanistan from Pakistan conducting terrorist operations

against people," he said. Pakistan has a lengthy, porous border with Afghanistan which is being fenced by Pakistan. Afghanistan Called Durand Line, the border was drawn up during British colonial rule. North Waziristan and other tribal regions that were merged into northwestern Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in 2018 long served as sanctuaries for local and foreign militants. For years the military carried out massive operations to clear them of militants and many fighters crossed into Afghanistan or hid in the mountainous terrain.

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Vol. 14 Issue 15 Wednesday 02 Jan to 08 Jan, 2019 www.PUNJABDUNIYA.com Published Weekly from New York

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## Bangladesh lifts ban on travel to Israel

(News Agencies)- Bangladesh has reportedly lifted its travel ban to Israel in an unexpected move welcomed by the Foreign Ministry Deputy Director-General for Asia and the Pacific Gilad Cohen. Passports for Bangladeshi citizens have until now included a caveat stating that the document was valid in "all countries of the world, except Israel."

Despite having no formal diplomatic ties with Israel, Bangladesh's home affairs minister Asaduzzaman Khan confirmed to the Bangladesh-based Weekly Blitz that newly issued passports will no longer explicitly single out Israel on official travel documents, opening up the possibility for Bangladeshi citizens to legally travel to the Jewish State upon renewal of their passports. Bangladeshi citizens who have traveled to or attempted to travel to Israel in the past have been arrested and charged with high treason, or threatened with that if they ever stepped on Bangladeshi soil again. This was the fate of journalist Salah Choudhury, editor of the Weekly Blitz, who attempted to travel to Israel in 2003 to attend a writer's seminar in Tel Aviv. He was subsequently imprisoned and charged with treason, sedition and blasphemy. Cohen lauded the move, and called for the two governments to work toward establishing formal ties, as Israel has done with other Muslim countries in the past year including the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan. "Great news! #Bangladesh has removed travel ban to Israel," Cohen tweeted on Saturday. "This is a welcome step & I call on the Bangladeshi government to move forward and establish diplomatic ties with #Israel so both our peoples could benefit & prosper."

## Bangladesh detains popular preacher in 'anti-terrorism' case

(News Agencies)- Bangladesh police have arrested one of the country's most popular preachers, whose rallies draw tens of thousands of people, on charges of inciting "militants", a senior officer said. Amir Hamza was detained in a raid at his home on Tuesday in the western city of Kushtia and then transferred to Dhaka, police said. Hamza is the latest high-profile religious leader to be held since March when a visit by India's Hindu nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi sparked protests in which at least 13 people died. A court remanded Hamza for 10 days for questioning, Mohammad Asaduzzaman, head of Dhaka police's counterterrorism unit, told the AFP news agency. "He is an accused in an anti-terrorism case," Asaduzzaman said, adding that investigators had found videos of Hamza's



speeches in the mobile phone of a suspect detained this month over an alleged plot to attack Bangladesh's parliament. Hamza, who is in his 30s, is one of a new generation of preachers whose firebrand speeches draw huge crowds in the country of 160 million. Hamza's YouTube video speeches get millions of views. In 2019, Mizanur Rahmani Azhari, another prominent preacher, fled the country over fears he would be prosecuted for his remarks. The visit by Modi was the spark for the new wave of arrests. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was

reportedly embarrassed by the protests during a visit by a key ally.

Protesters - mostly from the Hefazat-e-Islam group - accuse Modi of pursuing anti-Muslim policies and tens of thousands held mass protests during which some police stations and government offices came under attack.

They opposed Modi being invited to Bangladesh's Golden Jubilee celebrations of independence and the birth centenary of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the country's founder and father of current Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Bangladesh's deputy national police chief, Haider Ali, told AFP that at least 1,230 followers of the Hefazat group had been arrested since the deadly protests on March 26-28. Dozens of Hefazat leaders have been detained.

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## Myanmar ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi appears in court in person for first time since coup

(News Agencies)-Myanmar's ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi attended a court hearing Monday, her first appearance in person since the military seized power on February 1, her defense team said.

Suu Kyi, who has been detained since the coup, held a face-to-face meeting with her legal team for about 30 minutes before the hearing in the capital, Naypyidaw, her lawyer Khin Maung Zaw said.

"We discussed the cases (and) what line of defense we should take," Khin Maung Zaw said. "She wished the people good health and prosperity."

Prior to the hearing, Suu Kyi had only been permitted to speak with lawyers via a video link in the presence of security personnel. Suu Kyi faces a range of charges, from illegally possessing walkie-talkie radios to violating the official secrets act -- the most serious charge which carries a potential prison

sentence of up to 14 years.

The ousted civilian leader, whose National League for Democracy (NLD) party won a landslide in November 2020 elections, has not been seen in public since her detention.

According to Khin Maung Zaw, Suu Kyi had complained that 30 minutes was not sufficient to discuss all the cases against her, and urged her legal team to ask the judge to permit another meeting.

The lawyers also met with ousted President Win Myint, who was detained on February 1 alongside Suu Kyi, and is facing charges.

Last week, Myanmar's junta-appointed election commission said it would dissolve the NLD because of what it claims was election fraud. The military overthrew the NLD government alleging mass voter fraud, though the electoral commission at the time rejected the army's complaints.



## Federal charges against Steve Bannon officially dismissed

(News Agencies)-A federal judge granted Stephen Bannon's motion to dismiss the case against him on Tuesday following then-President Donald Trump's pardon.

"For the reasons stated above, Bannon's motion is GRANTED and the Indictment is DISMISSED as to him, pursuant to paragraph one of the Pardon," Judge Analisa Torres declared in a filing.

But Torres also pointed out that a pardon implies guilt.

If there be no guilt, there is no ground for forgiveness," she wrote. "It is an appeal to executive clemency. It is asked as a matter of favor to the guilty. It is granted not of right but of grace. A party is acquitted on the ground of innocence; he is pardoned through favor."

Bannon and three other defendants were indicted about a year ago as federal prosecutors accused them of defrauding hundreds of thousands of donors in a \$25 million "We Build the Wall" crowdfunding campaign. The Department of Justice said they were using the false pretense

that all the money would be spent on the construction of the border wall between Mexico and the U.S.

The four defendants were charged with conspiracy to commit wire fraud and conspiracy to engage in money laundering. They all pleaded "not



guilty" to the charges.

But on Jan. 19, just before leaving office, President Trump granted Bannon a "full and unconditional pardon."

The indictment had not been formally dismissed until now and, while Bannon had asked the court to dismiss it, prosecutors had wanted it to be administratively closed. Some legal experts have said that there

is a loophole because the pardon only concerns the current indictment, meaning that he could still be prosecuted on other charges.

"The drafters of the U.S. Constitution specifically limited the pardon powers of the president," explained David Weinstein, a former federal prosecutor. "They wanted to be able to limit the new form of government from repeating the unchecked abuses of power committed by the king of England. By forcing the president to specify what acts were being pardoned, they created this loophole."

Furthermore, while a president can grant a pardon on federal charges, state charges are safeguarded from federal powers and, last February, it became public that Bannon was being investigated by Manhattan District Attorney's Office, so charges could still be coming.

The government's case will continue for the other three defendants: Brian Kolfage, Andrew Badolato and Timothy Shea. The trial is tentatively scheduled for mid-November.

## Texas female deputies in human trafficking task force accuse superiors of sexual exploitation, abuse

(News Agencies)-Three former and current Harris County deputy constables allege they were being sexually exploited, molested and harassed by their superiors while assigned to a human trafficking task force, according to a federal civil lawsuit filed Monday.

The female officers -- Liz Gomez, Marissa Sanchez and Felecia McKinney -- claim they were rookie deputies when they were "handpicked" for undercover operations, "molested and traumatized by their intoxicated male commanding officers for their own sexual gratification," the lawsuit says.

And when the deputies reported the abuse to supervisors, the lawsuit alleges they were ridiculed, retaliated against and reassigned to less prestigious duties.

Jacquelyn Aluotto, a human trafficking advocate and the fourth plaintiff in the case, says



she reported the alleged abuse, too, and was subsequently transferred out of the human trafficking task force.

The lawsuit was filed against Harris County Precinct 1 Constable Alan Rosen, assistant chief Chris Gore and Lieutenant Shane Rigdon, along with Harris County.

In a statement, Rosen said an internal investigation has been conducted and his office's Administrative Disciplinary Committee "found no violations of law or policy."

"We immediately transferred

leadership of the Human Trafficking Unit to another supervisor who still maintains oversight of that unit today," Rosen said.

Rosen was first elected Constable of Precinct 1 in 2012. During his first year in office, he created the "Human Trafficking Task Force," according to his official biography posted on his office's website.

Field operations for the unit are managed by Gore and Rigdon, according to the lawsuit. None of the defendants

in the federal civil lawsuit have been charged with a crime.

Rigdon did not respond to CNN's requests for comment. CNN attempted, but could not reach, Gore for comment.

Lawsuit: Female deputies had to pose as prostitutes at 'bachelor party' stings

According to the lawsuit, Gore set up "bachelor party" stings at hotel rooms and had male undercover deputies pose as Johns and female undercover deputies pose as prostitutes. Gore selected the female deputies based on his "personal taste in women -- young, attractive, and Latina," per the lawsuit.

The lawsuit says Gomez was selected for the undercover operations in 2019 and was instructed to purchase "new and revealing clothing" for the operations and then send Gore, her superior, a text message with photos of the outfits.

"That's not slutty enough," Gore responded via text

message while instructing that "more provocative" clothing be purchased, according to the lawsuit.

Gomez was also ordered to accompany Gore to an adult sex shop to buy various items, all paid for with county dollars, the lawsuit alleges.

The alcohol for the sting "parties" was also purchased on the county dime, per the lawsuit; and they quickly turned into a "booze-fueled playground for sexual exploitation." According to the lawsuit, Rosen attended at least one of the "parties" personally.

"Rosen created and oversaw the 'bachelor party' unit which subjected untrained subordinate officers to sexual contact from their commanding officers," the lawsuit stated.

"I have a zero-tolerance stance against sexual assault and sexual harassment and would never allow a hostile work environment as alleged," Rosen said in a statement.



# Nearly 50 years after the crime, Massachusetts district attorney says teenager was murdered by a Catholic priest

(News Agencies)-Nearly 50 years after a Massachusetts teenager was murdered, officials announced Monday that a Catholic priest close to the family was responsible for the crime. On Friday, officials were obtaining an arrest warrant for Richard R. Lavigne, but he died that evening in the hospital, Hampden District Attorney Anthony Gulluni's office said in a statement Monday. Lavigne had some physical ailments, Gulluni said at a news conference, and had not been well for a period of time. Daniel Croteau, 13, was found dead in the Connecticut River in Chicopee, Massachusetts, on April 15, 1972, wearing the clothes he'd worn to the local Catholic school a day earlier, the DA's office said. Daniel and his four brothers served as altar boys for Lavigne at Saint Catherine of Sienna in Springfield, the DA's office said. The priest also took

Croteau and his brothers on outings without their parents multiple times and the priest had invited Daniel and his brothers to stay at his parents' home in Chicopee a few times as well, Gulluni said.

Lavigne was defrocked by the Catholic Church in 2004 because it had received numerous sexual complaints against him, according to Mark Dupont, spokesman for the Diocese of Springfield.

"Danny's parents, Carl and Bernice, told reporters that they just wanted answers. Based on the accumulation of historical evidence, the evidence gained in the last year, and the admissions of Richard Lavigne, I believe we now have those answers," Gulluni said in a statement.

"While formal justice may not have befallen Richard Lavigne here on this earth, we hope now to provide answers and some



measure of closure to Danny's family," he added.

Mystery letter was investigated In March of 2020, Gulluni's office turned fresh attention to the murder of Croteau, working with the Massachusetts State Police Detective and Unresolved Cases units. Investigators combed through thousands of documents, decades of evidence, and also

zeroed in on a letter that Lavigne told investigators that he'd received in 2004 from the teen's murderer admitting guilt, according to Gulluni's office. The letter was unsigned. An expert in forensic linguistics examined the letter on March 5, 2021, and compared it with other letters written by Lavigne, according to the district attorney's office. The examination report on May 21

said that the "language patterns in the questioned document are consistent with language patterns in the known Lavigne documents to the point that Richard R. Lavigne cannot be excluded as a possible candidate of authorship." Meantime, investigators questioned Lavigne for about 11 hours over several days in April and May, 2021, the DA's office said.

## QBP Richards to host unity rally in response to the ongoing rise in hate violence

QUEENS, NY — Queens Borough President Donovan Richards Jr., elected officials and community leaders from across the spectrum of religion, race and ethnicity will gather as One Queens today, May 26 at Queens Borough Hall for a Unity Rally, denouncing hate in all its forms against all communities represented in The World's Borough, including our Asian American, Jewish and Muslim neighbors, who have frequently been the target with bigotry and violence in recent months.

Held one day after the one-year anniversary of the murder of George Floyd, the May 26 Unity Rally, featuring speakers and attendees representing Queens' unparalleled diversity, comes in the wake of multiple disturbing incidents in recent weeks and months in New York City and across the nation. In Queens, a 35-year-old man of Asian descent was shoved onto the subway tracks at the 21st Street – Queensbridge station on May 24

but was rescued by passersby. The NYPD Hate Crimes Task Force is investigating the attack. Meanwhile, numerous anti-Semitic incidents have been reported across the city, including a May 23 assault in Brooklyn of two Jewish teenagers who were eventually escorted to safety by a Muslim for-hire driver who witnessed the violence, while a Brooklyn man was arrested and charged with a hate crime last week for vandalizing both a Roman Catholic church and a synagogue.

As of May 16, there have been 191 reported hate crimes across the five boroughs in 2021, according to NYPD statistics, compared to 112 at the same point in 2020, an increase of 70.5 percent. In NYPD Patrol Borough Queens North alone — made up of the 104th, 108th, 109th, 110th, 111th, 112th, 114th and 115th precincts — 29 hate crimes have been reported so far this year compared to just eight at this point in 2020.

# Iran approves hardliner for presidential polls, bars several hopefuls



included former chief nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili, a conservative; former Revolutionary Guards chief Mohsen Rezaei, a frequent presidential candidate; and current Central Bank governor Abdolnaser Hemmati, a low-profile moderate.

Even Raisi appeared to object to the large number of disqualifications.

"Since yesterday evening, when I was informed of the results ... I have made contacts and I am holding consultations to make the election scene more competitive and participatory," Raisi said on Twitter.

Larijani, who had voiced support for the nuclear deal and talks to revive it, said he accepted the Council's ruling. "Now that the election process has been conducted in this way, I have done my duty before God and my dear nation," he tweeted.

In a speech in parliament carried by local media, lawmaker Ahmad Alirezabeigi blasted Ahmadinejad's disqualification and said security forces had surrounded the populist hardliner's home, even though he had urged his supporters to remain calm.

(News Agencies)-Iran's election watchdog has approved the candidacy of hardline judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi in next month's presidential election, state television reported on Tuesday, while disqualifying some of his main rivals including former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The move is likely to boost the prospects of Raisi, a close ally of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. But it may further dent the clerical rulers' hopes of a high turnout in the June 18 vote, amid rising discontent over an economy crippled by US sanctions. As well as Ahmadinejad, the hardline-led Guardian Council barred former parliament speaker Ali Larijani, a moderate

conservative, and pragmatist First Vice-President Eshaq Jahangiri, an ally of outgoing president Hassan Rouhani.

Rouhani and his moderate allies have blamed most of Iran's economic woes on US sanctions and given top priority to talks aimed at reviving Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, which former US President Donald Trump quit.

But conservative and hardline allies of Khamenei have placed the responsibility squarely on the government, and insisted that Washington cannot be trusted to fulfill any accord. The Council approved just seven candidates out of 40 who met its basic criteria -- in turn a small fraction of the 600 who had registered. They

## Eric Adams Tops two new polls Mayor's Race Enters Final Month

New York, NY -- Leading mayoral candidate Eric Adams topped two new polls in the last 24 hours as the mayor's race enters the final month.

A Fontas/Core Decision poll out this morning found that Adams leads the field by five points with 18 percent of the vote. And a WPIX/Emerson poll out yesterday has Eric statistically tied for the lead. Adams has also

consistently led other polls recently as more New Yorkers make their decisions ahead of the June 22 primary.

"Eric Adams' message to New Yorkers is clearly resonating and the polls are reflecting that," Adams spokesperson Evan Thies said. "The more New Yorkers learn about Eric, the more they trust him to deliver a safer, fairer, healthier, more prosperous city."



# Canada expected to pass US on first dose Covid vaccinations as demand declines among Americans



(News Agencies)-After a devastating lack of vaccine supply earlier this year and a punishing third wave of the coronavirus pandemic, Canada is set to catch up to and even surpass the United States this week in the percentage of people with at least one dose of vaccine, data projections show.

Almost 38% of the US population has been fully vaccinated, and about 48% has had at least one dose, according to US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data. While Canada has less than 4% of those eligible fully vaccinated, it has vaccinated more than 46% with at least one dose.

The Our World in Data Covid-19 vaccination database estimates that Canada is currently administering 40% more doses daily per 100 people than the US, based on a seven-day average. Canada has benefited from the decrease in vaccine demand within the US. Pfizer's Michigan manufacturing facility began shipping more doses to Canada than previously scheduled earlier this month as US vaccinations declined.

Canada has nearly 38 million people, and the US population is about nine times larger.

According to data updated Tuesday from Our World in Data, Canada will catch up to the US likely by the end of the week in

the share of its population with at least one dose.

Canada's prime minister confirmed that vaccine deliveries, the majority of which will come from Pfizer, will continue to ramp up throughout June. Canada will break a record for vaccine deliveries in the coming days as it is set to receive 4.5 million doses of vaccines in a single week. "Four and a half million doses is our largest weekly shipment to date, and it will help Canada keep within the top of the G20 on daily vaccinations, where we've been for over two weeks," said Prime Minister Justin Trudeau during a news conference in Ottawa. However, Trudeau outlined a more cautious

approach with tougher benchmarks in order for public health measures to be lifted, possibly sometime in the fall.

"This fall, once three quarters of eligible Canadians are fully vaccinated, we'll be able to do more of the indoor things we miss, whether that's watching sports in person or a dinner party in a restaurant," said Trudeau.

Canada's chief public health officer, Theresa Tam, said there was a 25% decrease in active Covid-19 cases in Canada this week, compared to the peak of the third wave in mid-April.

Hospitalizations and ICU admissions related to the virus remain high in Canada, especially in Ontario.

## Louisiana trooper involved in Ronald Greene's arrest will be fired over unrelated use of force case, source says

(News Agencies)-One of the troopers involved in Ronald Greene's arrest will be fired over an excessive force incident not involving Greene, according to a Louisiana state official with knowledge of the investigation. The dismissal of Trooper Dakota DeMoss by Louisiana State Police is pending official paperwork, the official said Tuesday. The official did not provide details of this other case. Kory York, another trooper involved in the May 2019 incident with Greene, has been disciplined by state police for his role in Greene's death. The source said York is awaiting the outcome of a federal review of the case.

Earlier versions of this article, quoting two sources with knowledge of the investigation, incorrectly suggested that DeMoss and York were being

terminated for their involvement in Greene's death.

The news comes less than a week after video of Greene's arrest was released publicly -- initially by the Associated Press and then by state police -- that shows his encounter with police. Greene, a 49-year-old Black man, died after what the police described as resisting arrest and a struggle with officers May 10, 2019. However, his family said that they were told that Greene died in a car crash after a police chase, and their attorneys have accused police and state officials of engaging in a cover-up.

Greene's family filed a federal wrongful death suit May 6, 2020, alleging he was "brutalized by Louisiana State Police and Union Parish Deputy Officers which caused his death."

Videos from body cameras worn by Lt. John Clary, Trooper Chris

Hollingsworth, York and DeMoss were made public Friday.

DeMoss had been notified of the department's intent to fire him and remains on leave "pending the conclusion of disciplinary proceedings, related to a separate excessive use of force investigation," Superintendent of Louisiana State Police Col. Lamar Davis said Friday. York completed a 50-hour suspension and returned to duty pending the outcome of the review by federal and state authorities.

CNN has reached out to an attorney for DeMoss but has not heard back. York's attorney, Jay Adams, told CNN last Wednesday they had no comment on the pending litigation. Hollingsworth was set to be terminated for violations regarding body-worn camera and car camera systems, use of force, performance, lawful orders and for



conduct unbecoming an officer. But he died in a car crash before he could be fired, Davis said.

Senior officer did not initially report footage, police say

In addition, Clary, a senior officer who came to the scene of Greene's arrest, did not initially report his camera footage in the evidence submitted to District Attorney John Belton, according to a spokesperson for the Louisiana State Police. Clary was not part of the initial police chase

and did not initially report being part of the use of force incident.

Videos from Clary's body camera show troopers still holding Greene to the ground, Greene moaning, and troopers explaining their decision not to set Greene upright for fear he would spit blood on them. "Internal reviews are currently ongoing to determine why those videos were not identified during the original criminal investigation," Capt. Nick Manale said.

## Iraq estimates that \$150 billion of its oil money has been stolen from the country since the US-led invasion of 2003

(News Agencies)-An estimated \$150 billion of stolen money has been smuggled out of Iraq in corrupt deals since the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, Iraqi President Barham Salih said Sunday. "Of the close to a thousand billion dollars made from oil since 2003, an estimated \$150 billion of stolen money has been smuggled out of Iraq," Salih said in a televised speech. The statement came as the Iraqi President submitted a draft Corrupt Funds Recovery Act to the Iraqi Parliament. "The draft law seeks to strengthen the powers of Iraqi nation in order to recover money stolen in corrupt deals, to hold corrupt people accountable and bring them to justice," according to Salih. He urged

Iraqi lawmakers to discuss and approve the proposed legislation "to help curb this dangerous scourge that has deprived our people of enjoying the wealth of their country for many years." Salih said the stolen money would be enough to significantly improve Iraq's finances. According to Salih, the legislation would seek to recover the misappropriated funds through the cooperation of other governments and in partnership with international bodies. "Here I reiterate Iraq's call, which we have previously issued at the United Nations General Assembly, for the formation of an international coalition to fight corruption along the lines of the international coalition against ISIS," Salih said. Salih said the

challenge of corruption is no less dangerous than terrorism. "Terrorism can only be eliminated by draining its sources of funding based on corruption money as a political economy of violent," Salih added. Since 2019, hundreds of people have died in violent protests across Iraq against government corruption, unemployment and a lack of basic services, including electricity and clean water, as the country has failed to achieve stability following decades of sanctions and war. The Biden administration is eying an eventual withdrawal of US troops from Iraq as the country's security forces grow more capable and the threat of ISIS wanes, the two countries announced in a joint statement in April.



## Detained Belarusian dissident appears in video as fury mounts over 'hijacking' of Ryanair flight

(News Agencies)-Dissident journalist Roman Protasevich has appeared in a new video after his arrest by Belarusian authorities on Sunday, following the government's extraordinary diversion of his Ryanair flight to capital city Minsk. The video -- the first since Protasevich's arrest -- comes amid mounting fears for his safety and widespread fury over the diversion of a European commercial flight.

"The attitude of the [Interior Ministry] employees towards me has been as correct as possible and in compliance with the law," Protasevich says in the video, which was posted Monday evening to a pro-government social media channel.

"I continue to cooperate with the

investigation and have confessed to organizing mass riots in the city of Minsk," he also says. His supporters believe the video was made under duress.

Protasevich is one of dozens of Belarusian journalists and activists campaigning in exile against Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko's 26-year rule. He is the founder of the Telegram channel Nexta, which helped mobilize anti-Lukashenko protests, and was charged last year with "organizing mass riots and group actions that grossly violate public order." He is on a government wanted list for terrorism.

The 26-year-old dissident was traveling on Ryanair flight 4978 from Athens, Greece to Vilnius,

Lithuania on Sunday when shortly before touchdown the plane was diverted by Belarusian air traffic control to the capital Minsk over a supposed security alert.

Ryanair's CEO Michael O'Leary accused Belarus of "state-sponsored piracy," telling Ireland's Newstalk radio Monday that he believed Belarusian KGB agents were also on the flight that was carrying 26-year-old Protasevich, who is wanted in Belarus on a variety of charges. Similarly, Irish Foreign Minister Simon Coveney said that secret service agents may have been on the plane, telling national broadcaster RTÉ that the agents were "clearly linked to the Belarusian regime." "When the plane landed, either five or six people didn't reboard the

plane before it took off again, but only one or two people were actually arrested, so that certainly would suggest that a number of the other people who left the plane were secret service," he added.

Belarus borders three European Union member states -- Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland -- and EU leaders were discussing further action against Lukashenko's government on Monday, with global leaders calling on airlines to avoid Belarusian airspace, their citizens to leave the country and for the opposition activist's release.

Fears of torture, abuse

As the world turns its focus to Belarus, Protasevich's supporters are calling foul on Lukashenko's tactics. Critics of the Belarusian

strongman, including exiled opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, said that the video released on Monday appeared to be filmed under duress.

"This is how Roman looks under physical and moral pressure," she tweeted shortly after the statement surfaced. CNN cannot independently verify those claims but activists and protesters detained in recent months have reported suffering serious abuses and being forced to make confessions. The video also comes as Protasevich's father, Dmitry Protasevich, told CNN on Monday that he fears his son faces torture and physical abuse at the hands of Belarusian authorities.

## Police forces across Europe accused of 'ethnic profiling' when stopping and searching people



(News Agencies)-Police forces across the European Union have been accused of illegal "ethnic profiling" and discrimination after a survey found they were disproportionately stopping and searching members of various

ethnic, religious and other minority groups.

A report published by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), an independent organization, has for the first time highlighted racial disparities in

police stops across many EU countries.

The agency found that people from ethnic minorities, Muslims, those who do not identify as heterosexual, men and people aged 16 to 29 were being stopped and searched at disproportionately higher rates across the EU, it said in a press release on Tuesday.

The report was based on the EU Minorities and Discrimination survey of roughly 35,000 people from across the EU, the United Kingdom and North Macedonia. The likelihood of being stopped varied significantly based on people's backgrounds, it found. The report said that according to the survey, police stopped almost

50% of people from certain minorities in some countries.

FRA director Michael O'Flaherty said the report came at a time of increased scrutiny of police. "One year ago, the Black Lives Matter protests underscored the need to tackle racism and discrimination that are still all too common in our societies," he said. "It is time to rebuild trust among all communities and ensure police stops are always fair, justified and proportionate."

The report found that those who experienced racial profiling also tend to trust public authorities less than those who do not.

While the survey found that 14% of all people across the

EU were searched or asked for their identity documents when stopped by the police in the 12 months before taking the survey, that number rose to 34% for people from ethnic minorities.

People who identified as South Asian in Greece were the most likely of all groups in all countries to experience what they described as racial profiling by the police -- 89% said they had that experience in the five years before taking the survey.

Roma people in the Netherlands and Portugal also reported high levels of discrimination, with 86% and 84% of respondents in the two countries saying they have been racially profiled by police.

## A truce halted the bloodshed, but the frustration of young Palestinians is stronger than ever

(News Agencies)-A young Palestinian boy in thick eyeglasses stood dumbstruck as Israeli police dragged his grandmother, Rifqa, out of his family home. His eyes shifted between the uniformed men and the 92-year-old woman who squirmed in their clutches. Shouts rang out and, within minutes, the family was driven out of half of their home in East Jerusalem. It was a hot August day in 2009. CNN witnessed those scenes, which the then 12-year-old Mohammed el-Kurd says he can barely remember today. Abutting his current family residence is the part of the house his grandmother -- who died last

year at the age of 103 -- once lived. A Jewish man lives there now -- a settler, according to international law. Outside, a playground that was once an island of serenity for the Kurd children is strewn with litter and thick overgrowth. An olive tree which his family planted in 2000 stands in the middle of the garden. It was the first time I felt how minuscule I was in comparison to the hundreds of army and police and occupation forces that were accompanying settlers and throwing people outside of their homes," Kurd told CNN from the family's home in Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of Jerusalem this week.

"So much has been erased from my memory because of the intensity of the situation."

Kurd is now a poet. His first book of his poems centered on Palestinians' struggles is about to be published. He called it "Rifqa." Kurd is also a vocal advocate of Palestinian rights, and his family once again faces the possibility of forced displacement from what remains of his home. As the conflict between Israel and Hamas raged on this month, Kurd was outspoken in his activism around the plight of Palestinians in Gaza. After the declaration of a ceasefire brought an end to more than 11 days of conflict between



Gaza and Israel, Kurd and other Palestinians say they can rest a little easier. But they say their day-to-day reality hasn't changed. "For clarification, our neighborhood's situation is still terrible, and we are still closed off (to non-residents) and our

displacement remains a possibility," Kurd tweeted just after the ceasefire announcement, referring to Sheikh Jarrah, the epicenter of unrest that gripped Israel and the Palestinian territories this month.



# People are panic buying homes as prices skyrocket around the world

The fear was that house prices would collapse, as they reliably had done in past economic downturns. An increase in bankruptcies and unemployment would squeeze disposable incomes and make it difficult for highly indebted homeowners to keep up with their mortgages.

Those fortunate enough to own second homes would be forced to sell to build up cash reserves, putting even more downward pressure on prices.

"Actually, none of that happened," added Everett-Allen.

Instead, house prices soared even as the world suffered its worst slump since the Great Depression. From New Zealand to the United States, Germany, China and Peru, the same phenomenon has taken hold: home prices are skyrocketing, and many buyers are panicking. Among the 37 wealthy countries that make up the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), real house prices rose by almost 7% between the fourth quarter of 2019 and the fourth quarter of 2020 - the fastest year-on-year growth in the past two decades. So is this a bubble about to burst? No, according to Everett-Allen. Borrowing remains cheap and, once borders reopen, foreign investors will provide even further impetus to property markets, where purchasing activity has been largely driven by domestic buyers, she said.

"That will play out over the course of the rest of this year and next, and then there might be something of a lull," she added. The Covid effect

In an unexpected twist, the pandemic has benefited house prices.

That's because governments around the world helped homeowners by temporarily banning repossessions and providing trillions of dollars of support for workers and businesses. Interest rate cuts kept mortgage repayments affordable in many places, while temporary reductions to purchase taxes in some markets spurred home buying.

These measures cushioned the housing market from the coronavirus recession. But the pandemic itself has actually turbocharged prices.

"If you lock up the vast majority of the population for months,



they [rapidly reassess] what they want from their homes," said Richard Donnell, research director at UK property platform Zoopla.

As people were forced to transform houses into offices and classrooms, it didn't take long for a "race for space" to take hold. Wealthier individuals in several countries have fled cities for larger suburban homes with more outdoor space in the anticipation that they won't need to commute into central offices as much even after the pandemic ends.

Many of them are financially in a better position than they were before the pandemic hit, since they've spent less on vacations and eating out, and can therefore spend more on house purchases. For example, in the United Kingdom, commuter towns within easy reach of London, such as Bishop's Stortford and Winchester, have seen property values surge.

"Anything with a home office within an hour train ride of London is going for 10% above market value," according to Daniel Harrington, international head of growth at upmarket estate agent Fine & Country.

One trend Harrington has observed in capitals such as London and Paris sees wealthy executives trading their centrally located houses for something bigger but cheaper further out of the city, leaving them with enough cash to buy a small apartment downtown and a holiday home elsewhere.

That's heightened domestic demand for property in places such as the French Riviera, which is traditionally dominated by foreign buyers.

In the seaside resort town of Ilfracombe in southwest England, Lee Hussell, the director of estate agency Webbers, has sold two

properties in recent months for £100,000 (\$139,000) above the asking prices.

"In 38 years of buying and selling homes I haven't witnessed a market like it," commented Henry Pryor, a UK buying agent. "There have been stories of buyers paying £10,000 (\$14,100) plus just to be able to view a property."

With inventory levels in the United Kingdom some 30% below the norm, people are "panic-buying properties," Pryor added. Transactions have been tracking above average every month since November, with March notching 180,000 sales, almost double the average for the same month over the past 20 years.

Twelve months ago, people were panic buying toilet paper for fear they might run out. That's very much the sensation we have today [in the housing market]," he said.

House prices in Britain surged 8.5% in 2020 despite the worst recession in more than three centuries. That's the highest annual growth rate since 2014, according to the Office for National Statistics.

And it's not just the United Kingdom. In the United States, the number of sales of existing homes reached the highest level in 2020 since 2006, according to the National Association of Realtors.

House prices rose 9% in 2020 and have continued to climb, with the median price of an existing home hitting a historic high of \$329,100 in March.

In one staggering example of how frenzied the market has become, realtor Ellen Coleman received 76 all-cash offers on a \$275,000 fixer-upper in suburban Washington D.C. within three days of listing the property. The four-bedroom, 1,800 square-foot

home sold for \$460,000, a 70% increase on the asking price.

From Auckland to Shanghai, Munich and Miami, house prices appear to be defying gravity.

In Germany, properties are selling within two weeks of being listed and brokers are struggling to secure listings, according to Michael Heming, master licensee for Fine & Country in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. "It's a very strong market and prices are going higher and higher," Heming told CNN Business.

In Portugal, foreigners have been snapping up houses despite not being able to view the properties they're buying. Prices there jumped 6% in the fourth quarter of 2020 compared with the same period a year earlier, according to Knight Frank data.

Despite having no visitors from traditionally strong buyer markets, such as Brazil, Britain, France and Belgium, the first three months of 2021 has already broken sales records, according to Charles Roberts, Fine & Country Portugal's managing partner. "We have sold quite a lot of that blind," Roberts said, adding that foreign buyers want fresh air, open space and a picturesque bolthole to escape to for the next pandemic. "When travel opens up, I think we're in for three months of pandemonium." He recently sold an apartment in coastal Cascais, just west of Lisbon, for €3.5 million (\$4.2 million) to a South African who has never visited the town. In India, prices have declined following a 6.9% slump in GDP last year, but transactions surged following the end of the first lockdown. "Covid led to activity coming back into the market," said Hitesh Oberoi, the CEO of Info Edge, which owns India's largest property

portal, 99acres.com. "A lot of people want bigger homes," he added. "Many people felt that because the economy was tanking they would get good deals." Oberoi said that falling interest rates and lower duties on transactions in some parts of the country have also helped, but that the market is slowing down once again as India battles a devastating second wave of the virus.

Governments move to cool markets

In several countries, governments are already looking at ways to prevent their housing markets from overheating.

In New Zealand - where median prices for residential property increased by more than 24% over the year to March to a record high - the government is under pressure to stabilize the market, according to Wendy Alexander, the acting CEO of the Real Estate Institute of New Zealand. In March, the government announced a string of measures that they hope will "cool demand from investors" and slow the pace of price growth, Alexander said.

For example, tax loopholes have been tightened and ministers are considering clamping down on interest-only loans to speculators. In China, where house prices in "tier-1 cities" including Beijing, Shenzhen, Shanghai and Guangzhou rose by 12% on average year-on-year in March, "Beijing is more determined than ever to rein in property leverage," analysts at Societe Generale said in a note last week. "Over 30 cities, accounting for one-fifth of national sales in 2019, have rolled out major tightening measures," said Michelle Lam, Societe Generale's greater China economist. "These include buying and selling restrictions, credit restrictions, increasing the holding period for tax exemptions and fixing loopholes via fake divorces," she added. In the past, some couples have filed for divorce to get around caps that limit property ownership for families. But even with greater curbs in place, Societe Generale analysts expect the correction in house prices in China to be modest given that lending conditions will remain favorable and because of sound demand for urban property, limited supply in top-tier cities and persistent interest in property investment.



# Bungled pandemic response, attack on culture: Why Lakshadweep is up in arms against administrator Praful Patel

"arbitrary ways".

## ON PATEL'S HANDLING OF THE PANDEMIC

During the first phase of Covid, the Lakshadweep islands were a green Zone with zero cases. This was because of the collective efforts of the then administrator Dineshwar Sharma, elected representatives and the people, said Faizal.

"We formulated a special SOP putting in place a quarantine system: Anyone who wanted to visit Lakshadweep has to undergo seven days quarantine in Kochi and then, if they have a negative RTPCR test, would they be allowed to enter Lakshadweep, where they have to quarantine for an additional week," the MP detailed, adding that this process controlled the spread of the virus in the islands, where health infrastructure is lacking. However, immediately after taking charge, Patel

relaxed the SOPs, alleged Faizal. "We wanted economic activities but we demanded that the quarantine system must remain in place. But he did not agree and did away with it, and now Lakshadweep has India's highest positivity rate," the MP stated. **WHY THE OUTCRY AGAINST PRAFUL PATEL?**

The islands are now in turmoil due to the rash of proposals introduced by Patel, who also serves as the administrator of the UTs of Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu. The draft Lakshadweep Animal Preservation Regulation 2021 will ban the slaughter of cows, bulls and bullocks, while another legislation seeks to greenlight

liquor bars, ostensibly to promote tourism. Lakshadweep has long been a non-alcoholic zone and beef is a big part of

implement is what I should eat or what I should not eat. He is taking away my constitutional right," complained Faizal.



He further accused the administration of attempting to "usurp the people's land" by introducing the draft Lakshadweep Development Authority Regulation 2021. If implemented, it will empower the government to take any piece of land owned by any common man on the islands for "development" purposes, claimed Faizal. The MP also protested against

Patel's anti-goonda act in the island territory where the crime rate is very low.

Another proposed legislation is to make those with more than

two children ineligible to contest panchayat elections. It's worth pointing out that the total fertility rate of Lakshadweep is 1.6, well below the upper limit of two.

**'LEGISLATIONS PROPOSED WITHOUT CONSULTATION'** Faizal alleged that the administrator is coming out with these "reforms" without consulting the public or elected officials. "These draft notifications are being brought without discussion with elected representatives. This is against democracy," he said.

Activists and local leaders across party lines have come on record to condemn Patel's "autocratic style" of governance. In fact, Faizal, along with several LDF and Congress MPs from Kerala, wrote to the Centre demanding that Patel be removed from office and his proposals reviewed.

## If you hold an Indian passport, which countries can you travel to now?



Countries that had recently relaxed tourist visa rules for Indians including the Maldives, Nepal and the UAE, have put a ban again on Indian holidaymakers for the time-being.

"There was some hope with countries like the Maldives, Dubai, Seychelles and Nepal opening up for Indian tourists briefly. But now we are badly hit again. Flights aren't operating and countries aren't even issuing e-visas," Rajiv Mehra, President of the Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO), said.

Russia is one of the few countries that is allowing

Indians to arrive at tourist visas but with fewer flights operating at present, the outbound traffic isn't worth writing home about. Also, promises of 'vaccine holidays' are turning out to be false, because Russian authorities have confirmed to India Today Television that the country isn't inoculating tourists.

### TURKEY

Turkey is one of the few other countries still welcoming Indian tourists but it mandates 14-days quarantine upon landing. Travelers will have to undergo an RT-PCR test on the fourteenth day and only on testing negative,

will they be allowed to leave the quarantine facility.

### EGYPT

Egypt is a destination open to Indian tourists too, but all those arriving in the country will have to take a rapid DNA test upon arrival. If found positive, travelers will either be asked to return to their point of departure or will be isolated for at least 14 days.

### SOUTH AFRICA

restrictions, IATO's Rajiv Mehra said that India's pandemic management will be its key test. "All countries will wait till India's daily caseload drops to less than one lakh. Cases of black fungus now are a big setback too. We don't see outbound traffic improving before July or August. As for arrival of foreign tourists into India, that could see improvement sometime next

the tune of 15 lakh crore to the economy.

"As a first step, those vaccinated or those carrying 'vaccine passports' should be allowed to travel," said Subhash Goyal, Chairman, STIC Travel. In reference to Bharat Biotech's Covaxin that is yet to receive World Health Organisation clearance, Goyal noted that countries dependent on Indian tourists like the UAE will have

to give their nod, especially since they earlier allowed entry simply on the basis of negative RT-PCR test reports. Tourism industry leaders have asked the Centre to hurry up the necessary approval from WHO. Similarly, they've asked the government to clear the way for vaccinated foreigners to arrive in India and not insist on negative RT-PCR reports.

Speaking of inbound tourism, Subhash Goyal said, "2021 has been completely washed out. We hope if the situation keeps improving, then foreign tourists should start arriving from January next year, unless of course, there is a third wave. Ultimately, we will have to learn to live with this disease."



Meanwhile, South Africa is yet to impose any travel restriction on Indian tourists but flight options remain limited as do ports of entry. South Africa is currently under Level 1 curfew, which amounts to travelling under restrictions, possibly not amenable to holidaymakers. Speaking of the foreign travel

year and not before that," he added.

IATO estimates that the inbound tourism industry has suffered almost Rs 2 lakh crore directly in losses over the last financial year till March 31, 2021. The indirect loss value is pegged at almost Rs 6 lakh crore. As for outbound, the industry estimates losses to



# Explained: The good, bad and ugly of investing in cryptocurrencies

Earlier last week, another devastating bout of volatility hit cryptocurrencies and led to a sharp erosion in the market capitalisation of popular virtual coins. This was largely due to China's tight crackdown on cryptocurrencies and Tesla CEO Elon Musk's tweets about the environmental impact of mining the virtual coins.

But anyone who has been investing in cryptocurrencies will tell you that drastic price movements are normal in the cryptos and may increase as prices continue to rise.

Let's take into account the rise and fall of Bitcoin over the years to understand the dynamics of crypto trade. The market for cryptocurrencies was almost non-existent a decade ago when Bitcoin, the first virtual coin, emerged. In 2009, its value was \$0 after it was introduced. It was only two years later that the value of Bitcoin touched \$1 for the first time and in two more years, Bitcoin's value surged to \$1,000. In 2017, it galloped to almost \$20,000 but crashed to \$3,300 levels in less than a year. While Bitcoin was hitting all these milestones, it faced severe periods of volatility. For instance, when the virtual coin jumped to \$30 in June 2011 but plummeted to \$2 in the same year by November.

Similarly, Bitcoin had slipped to \$350 by April 2014 after hitting \$1,000 for the first time in November 2013.

All of these instances indicate that volatility is high in the crypto market, not just in the case of Bitcoin but all the other 'altcoins' that have emerged after it.

**CRYPTOCURRENCY TRADE**  
Analysts say that the cryptocurrency market has evolved drastically from a decade ago and is slowly finding space in the mainstream. Though it is

about cryptocurrencies, analysts believe that cryptocurrencies are now closer to being accepted as mainstream assets. **EASIER TO INVEST, LOGICAL PRICE MOVEMENTS**

While investing in cryptocurrency still remains a tricky space, the good part is that price movements are no longer unexplained or without logic.



far from replacing traditional currency, it has gained traction among younger investors over the past few years.

The year 2020 was particularly important for cryptocurrencies as valuations rose sharply in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic. One of the main reason why investors were lured towards virtual coins last year was weakness in traditional assets across the globe.

Some analysts even termed 2020 as the breakthrough year for cryptocurrencies, adding that the price boom observed last year is different from previous instances. Though governments around the world remain hesitant

For instance, wild price fluctuations that are frequent in the crypto trading space now have an underlying reason - be it a tweet from a big shot crypto backer or a country enforcing regulatory actions. Earlier, price movements in the crypto trading space were very hard to predict and mostly driven by factors that weren't easily identifiable.

This is the reason why there is still no concrete explanation behind the insane rise in the price of Bitcoin in 2017 and the subsequent plunge within a year. However, a research report from 2018 suggests that much of Bitcoin's surge in 2017 was due to market manipulation. Another

reason why cryptocurrency trading has become more accessible is the fact that there are more crypto exchanges around the world. People can easily create an account using their phone and start investing. Some crypto-dedicated apps even allow investors to make portfolios, which helps in diversifying assets. This will help investors invest in a pool of cryptocurrencies, giving them a chance to maximise their earnings while reducing overall risk.

Another factor that has made cryptocurrency trade favourable is that more analysts are now offering insights on how to approach the market - something that was not available a few years ago.

Even with the advantages, the benefits of cryptocurrencies trade are outweighed by a few critical hurdles.

**REGULATIONS ABSENT, CROWDING**

From being a niche asset for mostly tech billionaires and coders, cryptocurrencies have come a long way, with millions now investing in virtual coins. However, there are some critical problems that prevent cryptocurrencies from becoming a favourable asset class.

One of the biggest problems is the absence of concrete regulations. The fact that governments around the world are still apprehensive about cryptocurrencies is the reason

why there is little regulation to prevent the wealth of investors who invest in virtual coins.

Without any regulation, investors are unlikely to get their money back in the event of a scam or any other case of fraud. However, this is just one of the problems that cryptos face without regulation.

In the absence of government regulation, it is difficult to invest in cryptocurrencies even if they are legal. For instance, crypto exchanges in India face difficulties while dealing with banks.

Nischal Shetty, CEO and Founder, WazirX, told IndiaToday.in in an interview that most banks in India are not willing to work with crypto exchange platforms. Shetty said that UPI transactions still don't work on these apps, adding that deposits and withdrawals are stopped often.

"Banks are not giving us the option to accept deposits in the right way and if the banking system doesn't support crypto platforms, how they can work properly?" He asked.

It is worth mentioning that delays in important transactions can be a deciding factor in the world of crypto trade where price changes are rapid. While cryptocurrency trade remains legal in India, the fact that it is unregulated has prompted a lot of interested traders to take a step back. The situation is the same in many other countries around the globe.

## Subodh Kumar Jaiswal, CISF Chief and Former Maharashtra DGP, Appointed New CBI Director

Jaiswal was on Tuesday appointed the new director for the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). The decision was taken during a high-powered committee led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and comprising Chief Justice of India NV Ramana and Congress Lok Sabha floor leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury.

He has been appointed as the director of CBI for a period of two years, the ministry order said. Jaiswal is a 1985-batch IPS officer of Maharashtra cadre, and is currently serving as the chief of CISF. He has earlier held the positions of Mumbai police commissioner and the Maharashtra DGP. He has also held central posts, and has had long stints in the Intelligence Bureau and the Research and

Analysis Wing (RAW). The Central Bureau of Investigation was working without a regular chief for over three months after

IPS officer of Gujarat cadre, was appointed the acting chief of the agency after Shukla completed his tenure.



Rishi Kumar Shukla completed his two-year tenure on February 3. CBI Additional Director Praveen Sinha, a 1988-batch

6:30 pm at the 7, Lok Kalyan Marg, official residence of the Prime Minister, the sources said. During the 90-minute meeting,

Chowdhury objected to the process of selection of officers for the coveted post of CBI director. "The way the procedure was followed, it was in conflict with the mandate of the committee. On 11th (May), I was given 109 names and today (Monday) by 1 pm, 10 names were shortlisted and by 4 pm, six names were shortlisted. This casual approach of DoPT (department of personnel and training) is highly objectionable," Chowdhury had told PTI. The appointment assumes significance as the Supreme Court is hearing a petition filed by an NGO, Common Cause, on the delay in the appointment of a regular CBI chief. The Centre had last month told the Supreme Court

that the meeting of the selection committee for the appointment of the CBI director would be convened immediately after May 2. On April 5, the apex court had asked the Centre to consider convening the meeting before May 2 observing that "in-charge arrangements" for the post cannot go on. The petitioner has alleged that the government has failed to appoint a regular CBI director as per Section 4A of the Delhi Special Police Establishment (DSPE) Act. The plea has also sought a direction to the Centre to initiate and complete the process of selection of the CBI director well in advance, at least one to two months before the date on which the vacancy to the post is about to occur.



# Come Crisis, Why Does India Wilt and Whimper?

centres was massive. Everyone understood that it was a logistical problem than a supply constraint. This necessitated trucking to be fast, seamless and turn-around to be quick.

And since the pandemic has been a national disaster, the country's disaster control mechanism needed to be given more teeth.

It also required empathy and collaboration on a national scale right from the top leadership to the constable on the road. And for that to have occurred, an unambiguous message prioritising the passage of oxygen transport should have been delivered.

And while the government went on an overdrive to ramp up capacity, the distribution aspect was forgotten leading to avoidable delays. Worse still, while the human tragedies unfolded, the Centre and state governments were slugging it out in the courts and in front of the media.

Failure to collaborate even in the face of such a grim situation only underscores the nadir to which our disaster response mechanism in particular and politics in general has descended to. No matter what the calamity, the sordid game of one upmanship of our political parties was never put on the back burner.

The second Covid wave provided the Centre and state governments with an opportunity to collaborate and set in place an emergency response team with over-riding powers and carry out the distribution of oxygen with force and transparent equanimity. However, in reality whoever could flaunt his money or flex his muscles on the street got oxygen and the rest were left to fend for themselves and meet their gasping fate.

It was clear that after the first wave, while officials boasted about containing the spread, no clear-cut warning systems or



SOPs were put in place to tackle the second wave. As a reflex action, the Union health ministry was first tasked to respond to the problem. It was forgotten that it is a small ministry with very few PSUs to provide it with either the manpower or the resources required for taking on such a challenge.

It took few days for officials to realise that it is the PSUs

distribute the oxygen resources. Unfortunately by then, much time was lost and the death toll had spiked.

So much is the centralised functioning of our system and so great is the aversion in offering any sane experienced-based suggestion that the Centre which in peace time appeared clear-headed and resolute while taking big

tanker could reach Delhi Border, the local SHO could divert it elsewhere where his superiors wanted. Local politicians were free to intervene.

If after wading through these local government satraps, it did reach say the depot of DTC in Delhi which was used as temporary distribution point, people from hospitals including senior doctors had to be there to beg and beseech a clueless junior mandarin left to handle distribution. These doctors, who should have been serving in the hospitals had to resort to do this as there was no clear distribution policy in place.

The government could have launched a blockchain-based 'requirement cum need based app' to ensure fair, equitable and open-ledger based system of distribution for everyone to see.

However, one shouldn't

forget to highlight that during this crisis there have also been many instances of strong initiatives taken up by some well-meaning civil servants which softened the Covid blows. But ad-hocism by the Government and crass profiteering by individuals peddling medicines and equipment at 10 times the MRP was the order of the day. All rules were thrown out of the window and larger

consequences were ignored by the mighty. When an oxygen tanker from the UAE was arranged by some civil servants with the condition that these will be emptied and returned soon for re-filling and re-despatch, local politicians diverted them to Karnataka before they were forcefully stopped, averting a major international embarrassment.

In our hurried quest to become a "Vishvaguru", we had promised vaccines to numerous countries only now to drag our feet at home. This has not exactly strengthened our position as a reliable partner nation. One only wonders how difficult it could be to do some straight math and calculate our capacity to produce jabs and match it with the population which required the vaccine?

Further, in February, the Subject Expert Committee (SEC) of Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation's (CDSCO) threw all kinds of rule books at the likes of vaccine manufacturing giants like Pfizer. "We won't indemnify; we won't waive requirement of 'clinical trials' and the trials held in the UK, USA, and Israel are not good enough for us" and so on we said. Decision after decision, our narcissistic love for procedural grandiosity went to absurd heights of overlooking the urgent humanitarian crises which loomed and eventually did unleash its grim consequences. And if the likes of Pfizer are packed up and sent home in 15 days, why would anyone smaller even bother or dare to come?

However, luckily the second wave has started receding as fast as it began. But the message it has left is haunting. It has shown us that we remain a nation where a threatening and evolving situation is met by a conditioned bureaucratic response. Swift pragmatism is not what our system is skilled to exhibit. It is time we accord more importance to professional disaster management by giving bodies which deal with it more constitutional teeth. Otherwise, no matter what we are made to believe, we will continue to run the risk of being counted as a confused and a pathetic nation.



controlled by ministry of steel and ministry of petroleum along with the various "Reliances" and "Inoxes" of the world who control most of the oxygen in the country. And by the time the clueless Centre realised this, the scourge had spread.

Very quickly a task force of secretaries was constituted and Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) was given the charge to

political risk decisions, looked all at sea in a war-like-situation which required a quick, fair and fearless conversation with the commander.

While the scarce number of cryogenic tankers had to move and turn around swiftly, local politics was at play. For instance, if the Petroleum Ministry moved a tanker say out of Panipat refinery, an SDM in Haryana would seize it and divert it to his hospitals. If the



# Ransomware Attacks Are Spiking. Is Your Company Prepared?

With the migration to remote work over the last year, cyberattacks have increased exponentially. We saw more attacks of every kind, but the headline for 2020 was ransom attacks, which were up 150% over the previous year. The amount paid by victims of these attacks increased more than 300% in 2020.

Already 2021 has seen a dramatic increase in this activity, with high-profile ransom attacks against critical infrastructure, private companies, and municipalities grabbing headlines on a daily basis. The amount of ransom demanded also has significantly increased this year, with some demands reaching tens of millions of dollars. And the attacks have become more sophisticated, with threat actors seizing sensitive company data and holding it hostage for payment.

Who's behind the recent surge in attacks? And how should companies respond to this increased threat? In this article, I'll outline how ransomware attacks have evolved and what actions companies can take now to protect themselves.

## How Ransomware Attacks Have Changed

A few years ago, the majority of ransom attacks involved only the deployment of ransomware. Hackers would gain access through a phishing email that would deploy malware when an unwitting employee clicked on a link. The malware would then encrypt company servers, and the extortionist would offer decryption keys in exchange for a ransom - typically in the five or sometimes six figures.

Many times, the threat actors didn't even gain access to company information - and sometimes they didn't even know which company would be the ultimate target. They merely looked for systems to exploit and waited for the pay day. Once the ransom was paid - via Bitcoin or other cryptocurrency - the hackers would send decryption keys to gain access to their servers and even promise not to target the company again.

The game has changed more recently - and has become a massive business for those who perpetrate these acts.



According to Hiscox, Ltd., 43% of the more than 6,000 companies it surveyed had suffered a cyberattack in 2020 - up 38% in the 12 months before - and one in six of those attacks was a ransom attack. In 2020, the amount of ransom demanded grew to the mid to high seven-figure ranges. At the end of 2020 and into 2021, we have seen some ransom demands reaching into the tens of millions of dollars.

In addition to the higher demands, the methodology has changed. Attacks are focused on exfiltrating company information - and the more sensitive, the better. These threat actors, who are often highly organized criminal organizations in eastern Europe and elsewhere, have done their research. They understand the company's financial picture, the industry in which it operates, and how to exploit the company to maximum effect. In addition to deploying malware to encrypt company systems - targeting even the backup systems that are in place - the threat actors conduct reconnaissance of company files, ultimately exfiltrating large amounts of data, a terabyte in many instances.

The threat actor then follows up with a "pay up or else" ultimatum, contacting the company with an extortion demand, to be paid in cryptocurrency, to obtain the decryption keys and to keep the company's data private. The company is warned that should they choose not to pay, their sensitive information will be posted on the dark web on a "wall of shame" with others who were hacked and didn't pay the ransom. Journalists who monitor the dark web can pick

up this information and report more widely on the attack, sometimes causing damage to a company's reputation or exposing valuable intellectual property or other confidential information, including customer and employee data.

The company is left between a rock and a hard place - either pay millions of dollars in ransom to criminals or have sensitive and valuable confidential information publicly exposed.

Notably, there does appear to be "honor among thieves" in the system. These extortionists depend upon companies believing that if they pay, all copies of the stolen files will be destroyed and/or the decryption keys provided. And the attackers do keep their word. In fact, some of these organizations are downright customer-service oriented, for example, accommodating the preferred cryptocurrency of the extortionee (with a small percentage upcharge to do so). We have even seen a threat actor "throw in" the decryption keys as a goodwill gesture, even though the company had already negotiated a lower ransom based upon the fact that it didn't need the keys.

## What Should a Company Do If Attacked?

In the event of a ransomware or other cyber extortion event, companies should follow their written incident response plan, in particular notifying senior management and the legal department. Looping in an attorney from the start will ensure that the investigation is protected by attorney-client privilege and the attorney work product doctrine, reducing the risk of exposure in any class-action lawsuits or other legal claims that may be brought in

the wake of the data breach.

The company's insurance carrier also must be notified at the outset so that it can determine whether there is coverage under the applicable cyber insurance policy. The offer to pay ransom must be pre-approved by the insurance carrier prior to any communication to the threat actor.

The decision whether to pay a ransom rests with senior management and often the board. Every ransomware or cyber extortion event must be assessed individually as to whether to pay or not. Keep an open mind: Often, companies lose precious time as decision makers unacquainted with ransom attacks vow on day one that the company will "never, ever" pay, then come around to the realities of the situation, the availability of insurance money, and the need to protect stakeholders before ultimately deciding to pay. In addition, keep calm and buy time. Threat actors try to create urgency and panic with their demands. Slowing things down is helpful in making the right decisions for your organization. Key questions to consider when deciding whether to pay ransom include:

" How sensitive is the information that has been accessed or exfiltrated?"

" Does the company have back-ups of the information, or does it need the decryption keys?"

" Do the costs of refusal, such as business disruption, the impact to systems or customers, negative publicity or reputational harm, exceed the ransom demand?"

" Is the threat actor tied to a company that is on the U.S. Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) sanctioned-entity list? (If so, it may be illegal under U.S. law to pay the ransom.)

Depending on the severity of the incident and other factors, at the least most companies will file an online report with the FBI reporting the indicators of compromise (IOCs) involved in the attack to assist law enforcement in tracking these threat groups and hopefully someday bringing them to justice. So far, indictments in this area have been nearly non-

existent and American companies have been left largely on their own to thwart these attacks, despite good intentions from law enforcement.

## How Can Companies Reduce the Risk?

There are a number of steps that companies can take to reduce the risk of a ransom attack, as well as the risk of damage if an attack occurs. These include:

1. Review your company's incident response plan to be sure that in the event of an attack, it's clear who is responsible for what actions.

2. Review your company's cyber insurance policy and be sure that ransom is covered and that the level of coverage reflects the current reality.

3. Be sure multi-factor authentication is enabled on all company accounts, including service accounts and social media accounts, and that strong spam filters are in place.

4. Establish a communication channel on a secure texting app so that senior management can communicate in the event of a cyberattack that takes down company email systems.

5. Train your employees to identify phishing emails and educate them on the modus operandi of threat actors seeking to dupe them into clicking on links.

6. Identify high-risk employees, such as those with administrative rights to systems, who might help perpetrate an insider attack.

7. Assess the need for a prophylactic threat hunt by a reputable forensic firm engaged by counsel for privilege. For example, many companies treated the migration to a work from home environment as a "data security event" that would warrant a threat hunt of the system.

8. Assess the cybersecurity programs and protocols for your key vendors - particularly any entity that handles sensitive or critical company data.

9. Test back-up systems regularly and make sure they're segregated from other company systems. These are unprecedented times in the world of cybersecurity.



# Ransomware explained: How it works and how to remove it

Ransomware is a form of malware that encrypts a victim's files. The attacker then demands a ransom from the victim to restore access to the data upon payment. Users are shown instructions for how to pay a fee to get the decryption key. The costs can range from a few hundred dollars to thousands, payable to cybercriminals in Bitcoin.

## How ransomware works

There are a number of vectors ransomware can take to access a computer. One of the most common delivery systems is phishing spam - attachments that come to the victim in an email, masquerading as a file they should trust. Once they're downloaded and opened, they can take over the victim's computer, especially if they have built-in social engineering tools that trick users into allowing administrative access. Some other, more aggressive forms of ransomware, like NotPetya, exploit security holes to infect computers without needing to trick users.

There are several things the malware might do once it's taken over the victim's computer, but by far the most common action is to encrypt some or all of the user's files. If you want the technical details, the Infosec Institute has a great in-depth look at how several flavors of ransomware encrypt files. But the most important thing to know is that at the end of the process, the files cannot be decrypted without a mathematical key known only by the attacker. The user is presented with a message explaining that their files are now are now inaccessible and will only be decrypted if the victim sends an untraceable Bitcoin payment to the attacker.

In some forms of malware, the attacker might claim to be a law enforcement agency shutting down the victim's computer due to the presence of pornography or pirated software on it, and demanding the payment of a "fine," perhaps to make victims less likely to report the attack to authorities. But most attacks don't bother with this pretense. There is also a variation, called leakware or doxware, in which the attacker threatens to publicize sensitive data on the victim's hard drive unless a ransom is paid. But because finding and extracting such information is a very tricky proposition for attackers, encryption ransomware is by far the most common type.

## Who is a target for ransomware?

There are several different ways



attackers choose the organizations they target with ransomware. Sometimes it's a matter of opportunity: for instance, attackers might target universities because they tend to have smaller security teams and a disparate user base that does a lot of file sharing, making it easier to penetrate their defenses. On the other hand, some organizations are tempting targets because they seem more likely to pay a ransom quickly. For instance, government agencies or medical facilities often need immediate access to their files. Law firms and other organizations with sensitive data may be willing to pay to keep news of a compromise quiet - and these organizations may be uniquely sensitive to leakware attacks. But don't feel like you're safe if you don't fit these categories: as we noted, some ransomware spreads automatically and indiscriminately across the internet.

## How to prevent ransomware

There are a number of defensive steps you can take to prevent ransomware infection. These steps are a of course good security practices in general, so following them improves your defenses from all sorts of attacks: "Keep your operating system patched and up-to-date to ensure you have fewer vulnerabilities to exploit."

"Don't install software or give it administrative privileges unless you know exactly what it is and what it does."

"Install antivirus software, which detects malicious programs like ransomware as they arrive, and whitelisting software, which prevents unauthorized applications from executing in the first place."

"And, of course, back up your files, frequently and automatically! That won't stop a malware attack, but it can make the damage caused by one much less significant."

## Ransomware removal

If your computer has been infected with ransomware, you'll need to regain control of your machine. CSO's Steve Ragan has a great video demonstrating how to do this on a Windows 10 machine:

**The video has all the details, but the important steps are to:**

"Reboot Windows 10 to safe mode"

"Install antimalware software"

"Scan the system to find the ransomware program"

"Restore the computer to a previous state"

But here's the important thing to keep in mind: while walking through these steps can remove the malware from your computer and restore it to your control, it won't decrypt your files. Their transformation into unreadability has already happened, and if the malware is at all sophisticated, it will be mathematically impossible for anyone to decrypt them without access to the key that the attacker holds. In fact, by removing the malware, you've precluded the possibility of restoring your files by paying the attackers the ransom they've asked for.

## Ransomware facts and figures

Ransomware is big business. There's a lot of money in ransomware, and the market expanded rapidly from the beginning of the decade. In 2017, ransomware resulted in \$5 billion in losses, both in terms of ransoms paid and spending and lost time in recovering from attacks. That's up 15 times from

2015. In the first quarter of 2018, just one kind of ransomware software, SamSam, collected a \$1 million in ransom money.

Some markets are particularly prone to ransomware-and to paying the ransom. Many high-profile ransomware attacks have occurred in hospitals or other medical organizations, which make tempting targets: attackers know that, with lives literally in the balance, these enterprises are more likely to simply pay a relatively low ransom to make a problem go away. It's estimated that 45 percent of ransomware attacks target healthcare orgs, and, conversely, that 85 percent of malware infections at healthcare orgs are ransomware. Another tempting industry? The financial services sector, which is, as Willie Sutton famously remarked, where the money is. It's estimated that 90 percent of financial institutions were targeted by a ransomware attack in 2017.

Your anti-malware software won't necessarily protect you. Ransomware is constantly being written and tweaked by its developers, and so its signatures are often not caught by typical anti-virus programs. In fact, as many as 75 percent of companies that fall victim to ransomware were running up-to-date endpoint protection on the infected machines.

Ransomware isn't as prevalent as it used to be. If you want a bit of good news, it's this: the number of ransomware attacks, after exploding in the mid '10s, has gone into a decline, though the initial numbers were high enough that it's still. But in the first quarter of 2017, ransomware attacks made up 60 percent of malware

payloads; now it's down to 5 percent.

## Ransomware on the decline?

What's behind this big dip? In many ways it's an economic decision based on the cybercriminal's currency of choice: bitcoin. Extracting a ransom from a victim has always been hit or miss; they might not decide to pay, or even if they want to, they might not be familiar enough with bitcoin to figure out how to actually do so.

As Kaspersky points out, the decline in ransomware has been matched by a rise in so-called cryptomining malware, which infects the victim computer and uses its computing power to create (or mine, in cryptocurrency parlance) bitcoin without the owner knowing. This is a neat route to using someone else's resources to get bitcoin that bypasses most of the difficulties in scoring a ransom, and it has only gotten more attractive as a cyberattack as the price of bitcoin spiked in late 2017.

That doesn't mean the threat is over, however. There are two different kinds of ransomware attackers: "commodity" attacks that try to infect computers indiscriminately by sheer volume and include so-called "ransomware as a service" platforms that criminals can rent; and targeted groups that focus on particularly vulnerable market segments and organizations. You should be on guard if you're in the latter category, no matter if the big ransomware boom has passed.

With the price of bitcoin dropping over the course of 2018, the cost-benefit analysis for attackers might shift back. Ultimately, using ransomware or cryptomining malware is a business decision for attackers, says Steve Grobman, chief technology officer at McAfee. "As cryptocurrency prices drop, it's natural to see a shift back [to ransomware]."

## Should you pay the ransom?

If your system has been infected with malware, and you've lost vital data that you can't restore from backup, should you pay the ransom?

When speaking theoretically, most law enforcement agencies urge you not to pay ransomware attackers, on the logic that doing so only encourages hackers to create more ransomware. That said, many organizations that find themselves afflicted by malware quickly stop thinking in terms of the "greater good" and start doing a cost-benefit analysis, weighing the price of the ransom against the value of the encrypted data.



# Ransomware explained: How it works and how to remove it

According to research from Trend Micro, while 66 percent of companies say they would never pay a ransom as a point of principle, in practice 65 percent actually do pay the ransom when they get hit.

Ransomware attackers keep prices relatively low - usually between \$700 and \$1,300, an amount companies can usually afford to pay on short notice. Some particularly sophisticated malware will detect the country where the infected computer is running and adjust the ransom to match that nation's economy, demanding more from companies in rich countries and less from those in poor regions.

There are often discounts offered for acting fast, so as to encourage victims to pay quickly before thinking too much about it. In general, the price point is set so that it's high enough to be worth the criminal's while, but low enough that it's often cheaper than what the victim would have to pay to restore their computer or reconstruct the lost data. With that in mind, some companies

are beginning to build the potential need to pay ransom into their security plans: for instance, some large UK companies who are otherwise uninvolved with cryptocurrency are holding some Bitcoin in reserve specifically for ransom payments.

There are a couple of tricky things to remember here, keeping in mind that the people you're dealing with are, of course, criminals. First, what looks like ransomware may not have actually encrypted your data at all; make sure you aren't dealing with so-called "scareware" before you send any money to anybody. And second, paying the attackers doesn't guarantee that you'll get your files back. Sometimes the criminals just take the money and run, and may not have even built decryption functionality into the malware. But any such malware will quickly get a reputation and won't generate revenue, so in most cases - Gary Sockrider, principal security technologist at Arbor Networks, estimates around 65 to 70 percent of the time - the

crooks come through and your data is restored.

Ransomware examples

While ransomware has technically been around since the '90s, it's only taken off in the past five years or so, largely because of the availability of untraceable payment methods like Bitcoin. Some of the worst offenders have been:

" CryptoLocker, a 2013 attack, launched the modern ransomware age and infected up to 500,000 machines at its height.

" TeslaCrypt targeted gaming files and saw constant improvement during its reign of terror.

" SimpleLocker was the first widespread ransomware attack that focused on mobile devices

" WannaCry spread autonomously from computer to computer using EternalBlue, an exploit developed by the NSA and then stolen by hackers.

" NotPetya also used EternalBlue and may have been part of a Russian-directed cyberattack against Ukraine.

" Locky started spreading

in 2016 and was "similar in its mode of attack to the notorious banking software Dridex." A variant, Osiris, was spread through phishing campaigns.

" Leatherlocker was first discovered in 2017 in two Android applications: Booster & Cleaner and Wallpaper Blur HD. Rather than encrypt files, it locks the home screen to prevent access to data.

" Wysiwyw, also discovered in 2017, scans the web for open Remote Desktop Protocol (RDP) servers.

It then tries to steal RDP credentials to spread across the network.

" Cerber proved very effective when it first appeared in 2016, netting attackers \$200,000 in July of that year. It took advantage of a Microsoft vulnerability to infect networks.

" BadRabbit spread across media companies in Eastern Europe and Asia in 2017.

" SamSam has been around since 2015 and targeted primarily healthcare organizations.

" Ryuk first appeared in 2018 and is used in targeted

attacks against vulnerable organizations such as hospitals. It is often used in combination with other malware like TrickBot.

" Maze is a relatively new ransomware group known for releasing stolen data to the public if the victim does not pay to decrypt it.

" RobbinHood is another EternalBlue variant that brought the city of Baltimore, Maryland, to its knees in 2019.

" GandCrab might be the most lucrative ransomware ever. Its developers, which sold the program to cybercriminals, claim more than \$2 billion in victim payouts as of July 2019.

" Sodinokibi targets Microsoft Windows systems and encrypts all files except configuration files. It is related to GandCrab

" Thanos is the newest ransomware on this list, discovered in January 2020. It is sold as ransomware as a service. It is the first to use the RIPlace technique, which can bypass most anti-ransomware methods. This list is just going to get longer. Follow the tips listed here to protect yourself.

## Ransomware can interfere with elections and fuel disinformation - basic cybersecurity precautions are key to minimizing the damage

Government computer systems in Hall County, Georgia, including a voter signature database, were hit by a ransomware attack earlier this fall in the first known ransomware attack on election infrastructure during the 2020 presidential election. Thankfully, county officials reported that the voting process for its citizens was not disrupted.

The attack follows on the heels of a ransomware attack last month on eResearchTechnology, a company that provides software used in clinical trials, including trials for COVID-19 tests, treatments and vaccines. Less than a week after the attack in Georgia was revealed, the FBI warned that cyber criminals have unleashed a wave of ransomware attacks targeting hospital information systems. Attacks like these underscore the challenges that cybersecurity experts face daily - and which loom over the upcoming election. As a cybersecurity professional and researcher, I can attest that there is no silver bullet for defeating

cyber threats like ransomware. Rather, defending against them comes down to the actions of thousands of IT staff and millions of computer users in organizations large and small across the country by embracing and applying the basic good computing practices and IT procedures that have been

to a few thousand dollars, with the expectation that a relatively low dollar amount will motivate the victim to quickly pay the attacker to end the incident.

Ransomware attacks frequently begin through email as a typical phishing message purporting to be from someone the potential victim trusts, such as a co-

do. But the most common outcome is encrypting a user's data to hold it for a ransom payment. In other cases, ransomware encrypts a victim's data and the ransomware's creator threatens to release personal or sensitive information onto the internet unless the ransom is paid.

While ransomware attacks can affect any internet user or organization, attackers tend to target entities known for having less-robust cybersecurity defenses, including hospitals, health systems and state or local government computers. But health care remains an enticing ransomware target: In 2019, 759 health care providers in the U.S. were hit. Overall, ransomware attacks cost users and companies over US\$7 billion in 2019 as a result of either ransoms paid or through costs incurred in recovering from attacks.

Ransomware's toll

The first high-profile ransomware incident was launched by North Korea in 2017. Using malware called "Wannacry," the

attackers brought the British National Health Service to a paralyzing halt. Hospitals lost access to their computer systems and routine and emergency care was disrupted. But that was a preview of things to come: In 2020, a patient in Germany died after being diverted to another hospital due to a ransomware incident.

In 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, a ransomware attack crippled over 250 medical facilities run by American-based Universal Health Services. At eResearchTechnology, staff conducting COVID-19 clinical trials were locked out of their data and unable to conduct business for nearly two weeks. And it's not just health care organizations. The city of Atlanta was crippled by ransomware in 2018. Baltimore was similarly paralyzed in 2019. In both cases, city services - from tax collection and business licensing to real estate transactions - were unavailable to citizens. Numerous smaller cities around the world also have been affected by ransomware attacks.



promoted for years.

What is ransomware?

Ransomware is a form of malicious software, or malware, that typically encrypts a victim's computer files, holds the files hostage and then demands a payment to send the decryption key that unlocks the files. Individual ransomware payments usually range from a few hundred

worker or friend. However, emerging types of ransomware exploit existing or recently discovered security vulnerabilities - in other words, they hack in - to gain system access without requiring any user interaction at all.

Once a computer system is compromised, there are many things a ransomware attack can



# Ransomware 101: What Is Ransomware and How Can You Protect Your Business?

Your organization gets hit by ransomware. Immediately, a million questions come to mind: What is ransomware? What machines are infected? What is the root cause? What is the recovery plan? How do we prevent this from happening in the future? This was the case for many security professionals when the WannaCry ransomware hit in May 2017. If your organization had strong endpoint management and appropriately patched and updated your endpoints, WannaCry was largely a nonevent. However, if your machines were not updated, questions like these became very real, very quickly as the attack circled the globe bringing companies to their knees.

It's not just WannaCry; ransomware attacks were the most prevalent variety of malware last year, according to Verizon's "2018 Data Breach Investigations Report."

Meanwhile, Malwarebytes Labs tracked a 90 percent increase in detected ransomware attacks for business customers in 2017 and noted that "the monthly rate of ransomware attacks against businesses increased up to 10 times the rate of 2016." Clearly, it's time for companies to stop thinking it won't happen to them - and get ready for when it does. What Is Ransomware?

Before we get into what you can do to prepare for the inevitable, let's clarify what ransomware actually is and how it works. Ransomware is malware that holds your data hostage and demands payment for its release. It typically infiltrates a system with a phishing email or website infection and exploits an existing endpoint vulnerability.

Ransomware then establishes a foothold, expands to other endpoints, and moves to discover, collect, stage and encrypt target data. Once the damage is done, it covers its tracks and exfiltrates data for use or sale on the dark web. Ransomware is unique because once it is in your environment, there are very few remedies available - all recourse is costly and business interruption is inevitable.

**How to Protect Your Business From Ransomware**

The good news is that many flaws exploited in ransomware attacks are known vulnerabilities. This means that organizations have the opportunity to prevent most



ransomware from being successful before an attack is ever launched.

It is important to prepare your defense so you can respond quickly and effectively during an attack, and remediate and restore where necessary after an attack. The first and most cost-effective remedy is prevention.

**Prior to an Attack**

As the saying goes, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Develop an incident response plan and practice executing it. Instead of waiting for an attack to occur, educate your employees proactively to help them recognize ransomware threats and their various infection vectors, including email, macros and compromised websites.

From an administrative perspective, understand what is on your network at all times and maintain a live inventory of these devices. This lets you know where and to what degree you are at risk from various vulnerabilities and helps streamline remediation efforts by knowing which devices to remediate first.

To minimize attack vectors from known vulnerabilities, establish an aggressive and current patch management policy for updating endpoints, operating systems and applications. Focus on achieving high, first-pass patch success rates to minimize the amount of time you have to spend determining root causes for multiple patch failures. Consider using an automated patch management tool to reduce your patch times from days or weeks to hours or minutes, increasing productivity and freeing resources to address other security concerns.

Additionally, you should establish and maintain a

minimum security baseline. Incorporate security best practices into all endpoint builds and ensure a consistent "golden image" that adheres to your security policy. Enforce these configuration controls and security baselines on all endpoints. This will help eliminate configuration and compliance drift with protection that travels with the machine.

Next, ensure that your desired controls are in place and operational. Leverage antivirus, endpoint protection platforms (EPPs) and endpoint detection and response (EDR) tools to improve security and automate restart if services are stopped for any reason. Restrict execution of programs from temporary folders and confirm that only authorized executables are running on your devices. Consider prohibiting attachments with executables from email to reduce the number of potential attack agents that can infect your environment. You should also enforce least privilege methodology and restrict user accounts and applications to only those necessary to perform job functions; this will help minimize the impact a ransomware attack can have on other accounts and applications.

Finally, limit common attack vectors by disabling Flash and Windows Script Host (WSH). The more prepared you are in advance, the better your chances of avoiding (or surviving) a ransomware attack.

**During an Attack**

In the event that ransomware is successful in gaining a foothold in your organization, having a response plan and the right tools in place is vital to limiting the potential damage. Organizations must be able to identify the scope of the attack, contain the event

quickly, protect machines that have not been affected, isolate machines that have, restore from backup where appropriate, and update and patch machines where vulnerable.

Start by knowing how to recognize a ransomware event. Look for pop-up messages that demand payment to provide access to data. See if your users are attempting to access a file on the network or on a local device and find out if it is encrypted. Then, determine if any endpoints are making connections that are out of character.

If you are experiencing an active attack, follow your response/remediation plan and decide if you can restore from backup or pay the ransom. Make sure you engage law enforcement - it's worth noting that the FBI advises against paying a ransom fee. After all, there is no guarantee that paying a ransom will result in the restoration of your data. It's a good idea to use a smartphone or camera to take a photograph of the ransom note and provide that to law enforcement.

Next, identify the type of ransomware variant. Sometimes you can find the name in the ransom note. Otherwise, you can share copies of the ransom note and/or an encrypted data file with ransomware experts who can evaluate it against known attacks and signatures. Knowing the type of ransomware will help you determine the best recovery option.

To limit damage, turn off all potentially infected endpoints and disconnect them from the network. It's a good idea to also turn off any other devices (including external drives) for the duration of the attack until you

know they are fully cleaned. Also, work offline while cleaning/checking machines and cut connectivity to local networks and file-syncing services to avoid ransomware spreading to other devices.

Many forms of encrypting ransomware copy your files, scramble the copies and delete the originals. Try to restore lost or damaged files by using data recovery tools to see if you can restore the files on your own. If this doesn't work, continue to execute the restoration plan that was defined prior to the attack and see if you can restore your files from a backup. Before you do this, you should check to make sure ransomware is not part of the backup process and that your backup data is not encrypted.

Next, remove the ransomware from the infected device(s). Use antivirus or anti-malware software to clean the infected machine, but remember that simply removing the ransomware will not decrypt your files, and it may impact your ability to get your files back should you choose to pay the ransom. You might also consider wiping your entire hard drive and reinstalling your operating system and applications.

**After an Attack**

To prevent reinfection, apply all critical patches to your operating systems and applications. Start with patching the vulnerability that was exploited across your environment and validate that the malware was removed successfully and completely.

Finally, file a police report. This is an important legal step that is often required if you are filing an insurance claim or considering a lawsuit related to your infection. This also helps law enforcement monitor ransomware activity, growth and other trends.

**Keep Ransomware Off Your Network-** Most successful ransomware attacks gain access to your environment through a known vulnerability on a compromised endpoint. The best way to avoid this is by inoculating your endpoints against ransomware. Endpoint hygiene should ensure that patches are up to date and applications are on the most secure version. You also need visibility into what is happening on the endpoint and across the network so you can contain attacks quickly.



# A Peek Inside the Underground Ransomware Economy

Threat hunters weigh in on how the business of ransomware, the complex relationships between cybercriminals, and how they work together and hawk their wares on the Dark Web.

Ransomware is not just a type of malware - it's also at the center of a sophisticated, flourishing underground economy that has all the conventions of legitimate commerce.

It's a community made up of major malware developers, affiliates and channel partners, and those that provide adjacent services, such as selling network access. Operators even have their own publicity arms that put out press releases and maintain their "brands," and they have customer-service operations.

They found that the general economy of ransomware is well-developed and complex, with "several actors supplying services to one another," according to research from Kaspersky. For instance, botmasters offer access to already-compromised devices; software developers improve the malware; and initial access brokers specialize in providing network access via backdoors or security vulnerability exploits for things like Remote Desktop Protocol (RDP).

"This access can be sold in an auction or as a fixed price, starting as low as \$50," Kaspersky researchers said, in a recent posting. "The attackers who create the initial compromise, more often than not, are either botnet owners who work on massive and wide-reaching campaigns

and sell access to the victim machines in bulk, or hackers who are constantly on the lookout for publicly disclosed software vulnerabilities to exploit as soon as they are announced and before a patch is applied."

**RaaS Affiliates Are Carefully Vetted**

At the center of the scene is the fact that ransomware operators often adopt affiliates, to whom they provide ransomware-as-a-service (RaaS) offerings. Affiliates can be seen as the channel



partners of the underground, responsible for ransomware distribution to end victims. They usually pocket between 60 and 80 percent of the ransom, with the rest going into the operators and authors' coffers.

These gangs run like legitimate businesses: They have customer service and IT support, and will do what they can to boost their brand reputation," according to experts at Intel 471, in a collaborative interview. "So, your most popular variants are those that result in higher payouts and take care of the criminal's asks once they

are brought into an affiliate program." RaaS operations carefully select their affiliate partners, with requirements that vary from technical expertise to the ability to prove they have roots in Russia or the former Soviet states. "Well-established ransomware gangs are known to be rather picky," according to Intel 471. "The basic requirement for a candidate willing to enroll into any high-profile RaaS affiliate program is typically to demonstrate availability of compromised accesses or potential

sources of such accesses to lucrative corporate networks."

In a 2020 posting in the Russian-language Exploit forum, MedusaLocker posted its requirements to prospective affiliates. These included "practical experience with ransomware, confident user of Cobalt Strike, able to escalate local administrator and domain administrator privileges,

working knowledge of backup systems and understanding of OpSec." Meanwhile, in order to prevent infiltration of affiliate programs by western law-enforcement services and by cyber-threat researchers, some RaaS gangs implement additional precautions, which include vouching by existing members, a requirement for a native command of the Russian language, or vetting of local and cultural knowledge pertaining to Russia and ex-USSR countries, Intel researchers added. For example, a posting in the Exploit

cybercrime forum by the REvil ransomware gang in fall 2020 noted, "No doubt, in the FBI and other special services, there are people who speak Russian perfectly, but their level is certainly not the one native speakers have. Check these people by asking them questions about the history of Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan or Russia, which cannot be googled. Authentic proverbs, expressions, etc."

This complicated vetting processes arises from the fact that criminals who make money illegally from online fraud operate within tight-knit circles by necessity, Dustin Warren, senior security researcher at SpyCloud, told Threatpost.

"It is not uncommon for criminals to be vouched into these trusted circles where they work with other criminals participating in various types of fraud," he said. "Reputation is everything to these criminals, and they work for a very long time to establish this reputation so that they can get into these circles where money is being made."

**Competing for Market Share**

In the cybercriminal underground, ransomware samples and builders are going for anywhere between \$300 to \$4,000, with ransomware-as-a-service rentals costing \$120 to \$1,900 per year. That's according to a recent analysis by Kaspersky of the three main underground forums where ransomware is circulated.

In some cases, this has led to a bit of an arms race to develop the most innovative, advanced or stealthiest code for the market.

## 7 real and famous cases of ransomware attacks

Ransomware is a type of malware that hijacks and blocks files or systems, preventing the user from having access to them. Ransomware is a hijacker. Using encryption, it holds files and systems hostage. Theoretically, when the victim pays the ransom amount, he receives the decryption key, releasing blocked files or systems.

I used the word theoretically because, in many cases, the victim pays the amount that was required and still doesn't receive the key. By the way, it's usually required that the ransom is paid in cryptocurrency, such as, for example, bitcoin and monero. The point is precisely to make it difficult to track the cybercriminal.

Ransomware has been terrifying individuals and, most importantly, companies for about 30 years. The worse is that, over time, they have become more advanced and sophisticated threats. New



tactics and technologies are used, either to deceive detection solutions, to encrypt different types of files, or to convince the user to pay the ransom amount. Both the FBI and Europol point to ransomware as one of the main threats in the digital world. In fact, the European agency named ransomware the main cyber threat of 2019. The US agency pointed out that, in 2019, about 2,400 ransomware attacks were registered in the world, resulting in losses of more than USD 8 million.

The examples of ransomware attacks listed below show you how these attacks can work,

giving an idea of the damage that ransomware do to companies and people. In this article, we'll cover the following examples of ransomware:

Check out 7 examples of ransomware attacks

1. Ryuk, 2019 and 2020

Like most infections caused by ransomware, Ryuk is spread mainly via malicious emails, or phishing emails, containing dangerous links and attachments. The ransom amount to be paid to release an entire system can exceed USD 300,000, making Ryuk one of the most expensive ransomware in history, well above the

average. According to the FBI, Ryuk's attacks have already caused more than USD 60 million in damage worldwide since this type of ransomware stopped the operations of major newspapers in the United States. More than 100 companies suffered attacks. In 2020, for example, EMCOR Group (engineering and industrial construction company) and Epiq Global (legal services company) suffered incidents involving Ryuk.

An interesting fact is that Ryuk's ransom notes contain contact emails with the end @protonmail.com or @tutanota.com. The victim needs to send a message to find out how much they must pay for the decryption key.

2. SamSam, 2018

SamSam ransomware was identified a few years ago, more precisely in late 2015. But it was in 2018 that it gained much more prominence after infecting

the city of Atlanta, the Colorado Department of Transportation and the Port of San Diego, in the U.S., abruptly stopping services. In the same year, two Iranian hackers were accused of using SamSam against more than 200 organizations and companies in the U.S. and Canada, including hospitals, municipalities and public institutions. A loss of USD 30 million is estimated as a result of the attacks.

Just the city of Atlanta spent more than USD 2 million to repair the damage. Hancock Health, an Indiana hospital, paid a ransom of USD 55,000. To spread, this type of ransomware often exploits vulnerabilities in Remote Desktop Protocols (RDP) and File Transfer Protocol (FTP). A curious fact about SamSam is that the victim is asked to make a first payment for a first key, which would unlock only a few machines. It would be like a sign of honesty.



# Ban Cryptocurrency to Fight Ransomware

**The existence of bitcoin and the rest benefits nobody except criminals and speculators.**

No one is out of reach from ransomware attacks. The Colonial Pipeline hack made that clear, along with the nearly 2,500 cases of ransomware—a form of malware that encrypts computer files and holds them for ransom—reported to the Federal Bureau of Investigation last year, a 66% annual increase. In 2020 ransomware victims paid hackers \$350 million in cryptocurrency. Since many victims pay ransom without reporting the incident, these numbers understate the damage.

The solutions floated after the Colonial hack—improved cybersecurity in the private sector and public-private collaboration to protect critical infrastructure—are pro forma and inadequate. There is a simpler and more effective way to stop the ransomware pandemic: Ban cryptocurrency. Ransomware can't succeed without cryptocurrency. The pseudonymity that crypto provides has made it the exclusive method of payment for hackers. It makes their job relatively safe and easy. There is even a new business model in which developers sell or lease ransomware, empowering malicious actors who aren't tech-savvy themselves to receive payment quickly and securely. Before cryptocurrency, attackers had to set up shell companies to receive credit-card payments or request ransom payment in

prepaid cash cards, leaving a trail in either case. It is no coincidence that ransomware attacks exploded with the emergence of cryptocurrency. Banning anything runs counter to the American ethos, but as our experience with social media should teach us, the innovative isn't always an unalloyed good. A sober assessment of cryptocurrency must conclude that the damage wrought by crypto-fueled ransomware vastly outweighs any benefits from cryptocurrency.

It isn't obvious that cryptocurrency provides any benefit at all beyond the chance to make a quick buck. I have been studying the crypto market since its inception, and I have yet to identify a single task or process that crypto makes easier, better, cheaper or faster. Don't take my word for it. Ask any friend why he owns cryptocurrency, and the answer will invariably be "to make money." In other words, speculation. (The blockchain technology that underpins crypto does have promising applications in supply-chain management and other areas.)

Because I point this out, crypto enthusiasts call me a Luddite, statist, technophobe or worse. Asset bubbles are maintained by a common narrative, and anyone who dares question it must be attacked. But a growing chorus is pointing out the emperor has

no clothes.

A day after the Colonial Pipeline shutdown, cryptocurrency champion and self-proclaimed "Dogefather" Elon Musk went on "Saturday Night Live" and admitted the obvious: The dogecoin cryptocurrency is a "hustle." He then performed an encore by tweeting that Tesla was suspending the use of bitcoin for vehicle purchases due to the coin's carbon footprint. The computer "mining" and transfer of bitcoin requires a great deal of energy, much of which comes from burning fossil fuels. In response, the narrative has now expanded to include the absurd premise that crypto encourages the development of sustainable energy.

Aside from Libra, Facebook's initial ill-fated foray into cryptocurrency, the topic has drawn limited interest on Capitol Hill. There is a Congressional Blockchain Caucus with around 30 members, but it says it has "decided on a hands-off regulatory approach, believing that this technology will best evolve the same way the internet did; on its own." The issue hasn't been tarred by the brush of partisan politics, but the crypto industry is hurriedly following the well-trod path to K Street lobbying.

Lawmakers should get serious. The Colonial Pipeline incident disrupted the East Coast's gas

supply. The next attack could be deadly. Imagine one that shuts down the power grid during a heat wave or taints a municipal water supply.

Any solution must at least reduce the use of cryptocurrency. Governments and retailers should be encouraged not to accept payment in it. An outright ban could get the job done, but if it would be too difficult to enforce or get through Congress, regulators could crack down on the off-ramps and on-ramps, the points at which crypto is converted into fiat currency and vice versa.

Cryptocurrency firms serving U.S. customers are supposed to be subject to the same anti-money-laundering requirements as traditional financial institutions, but more can be done. Late last year, the Treasury Department's Financial Crimes Enforcement Network proposed a rule to establish new reporting, verification and record-keeping requirements for certain cryptocurrency transactions. Last week Treasury proposed granting more resources to the Internal Revenue Service to address crypto and called on businesses to report receipts of more than \$10,000 in cryptocurrency. Both proposals should be adopted, but they will be effective only if other countries follow suit.

So long as there are crypto

exchanges abroad with lax money-laundering controls, cryptocurrency will maintain its appeal to hackers. Bloomberg reported on May 13 that money-laundering and tax officials at the Justice Department and IRS are investigating the world's biggest cryptocurrency exchange, Binance Holdings, which is incorporated in the Cayman Islands and has an office in Singapore.

Like climate change, cryptocurrency presents a classic collective-action problem. Some policy makers recognize the dangers but are hesitant to act for fear of driving crypto companies overseas without doing much to solve the problem. Diplomacy may bear fruit in the long run, but meanwhile President Biden should sign an executive order requiring the Treasury secretary, in coordination with all federal financial regulatory agencies and the IRS, to develop a more coherent regulatory framework for cryptocurrency and identify steps each agency can take to counteract its use in financing terrorism and facilitating ransomware attacks.

We can live in a world with cryptocurrency or a world without ransomware, but we can't have both. It is time for the adults to tell the children: Party's over.

**By Lee Reiniers**

## Suspected Iranian hackers pose as ransomware operators to target Israeli organizations

Ever since a 2012 hack that disabled tens of thousands of computers at oil giant Saudi Aramco, suspected Iranian operatives have been known to regularly use data-wiping hacks against organizations throughout the Middle East.

Now, one such possible group has been posing as ransomware operators in an effort to conceal the origin of a series of data-wiping hacks against Israeli organizations, according to private-sector investigators. The hackers are demanding extortion fees even when the code they deploy deletes data rather than unlocks it.

The findings, published Tuesday by security firm SentinelOne, suggest a growing willingness by

certain Iran-linked hacking groups to use tactics associated with financially motivated criminals in order to advance their interests. "Deploying ransomware is a disruptive act that provides deniability, allowing the attackers to conduct destructive activity without taking the full responsibility of those acts," said Amitai Ben Shushan Ehrlich, a threat intelligence researcher at SentinelOne.

SentinelOne attributed the hacks with "medium confidence" to a group "affiliated with Iran" that it is calling Agrius. The researchers cited, among other evidence, the group's use of servers that have been linked to Iranian internet domains and malicious code from the campaign that was uploaded

from Iran and other Middle Eastern countries.

The research follows other evidence that suspected Iranian government organizations have been increasingly willing to dabble in ransomware. Recently leaked documents suggest Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has been involved in a ransomware campaign through a contracting company, according to threat intelligence firm Flashpoint.

The Iranian government regularly denies involvement in cyberattacks. The Iranian Mission to the United Nations did not respond to a request for a comment on the research.

It wouldn't be the first time that a state allegedly used a wiper that posed as ransomware. In 2017,

the NotPetya malicious software spread to dozens of countries, causing billions of dollars in losses to the pharmaceutical, shipping and other industries. The U. S. and U.K. governments blamed Russia for the malicious activity. The hacks tracked by SentinelOne have targeted unnamed Israeli organizations for over a year and followed a pattern. Early on in the campaign, the attackers deployed a data "wiper" designed to delete files on a network and make it difficult for the victims to rebuild their systems, according to SentinelOne. In later hacks, the operators turned the wiper into a "fully functional ransomware" that in one case was used against a government-owned maritime

facility in the United Arab Emirates, the researchers said.

The research comes at a time when evidence of hacking operations that Iran and Israel have been conducting against each other is increasingly coming into public view. Suspected Iranian hackers impersonated a well-known Israeli physicist as part of a campaign to break into the email accounts of some two-dozen medical researchers in Israel and the U.S., security firm Proofpoint said in March. Ohad Zaidenberg, senior cyber intelligence researcher at Israeli firm ClearSky, said that suspected Iranian hackers have carried out multiple influence operations focused on Israeli organizations in recent months.



# Do We Have The Right To Mourn The Demise Of Sunderlal Bahuguna?



*The trees which Sunderlal Bahuguna planted in Uttarakhand are now being uprooted to make way for the Char Dham highway project and instead of acting to preserve his legacy we are making do with false condolences*

Apart from the general sense of loss and sadness, a few things crossed my mind when I heard the news that Sunderlal Bahuguna is no more with us. The subset of mainstream media and social media ran pieces on their platforms, mourning the loss of a noted environmentalist. Piece by piece, Bahuguna Ji's works were celebrated and ounce by ounce he was lauded for his contribution to

safeguarding the environment. A narrative so perfect that everyone read, mourned, and passed on the information by offering their obeisance to the departed soul; some by folding their hands in respect and others by incessantly typing RIP on the comments sections. Sunderlal Bahuguna's participation in the much-lauded Chipko movement and the Gandhian way to fight against the construction of the

Tehri Dam is a statement that many have not forgotten. But the setback is much deeper because unlike the nature of activism in general he pointed out everyone's contribution and held them accountable for their action. The sheer fact an act of embracing a tree can make a huge difference has made us aware of how simplistically we can establish a relation between man and nature. Heralding the movement in 1973 in Uttarakhand (then Uttar Pradesh), the environmental movement became an emblem of hope to tackle concerns like deforestation and inspired eco-groups and environmental policies all over the world. The movement's commitment and outreach assisted in decelerating the rapid deforestation, exposed vested political and bureaucratic interests, whereby it also enhanced ecological awareness and depicted the true role of people's power. Sunderlal Bahuguna did not hesitate to point out the ecological disasters in the Himalayan region were in fact "a manmade disaster. When

you try forcefully to change nature and its landscape, it gets back and punishes you." It is almost twelve days ago that a cloudburst ravaged Devprayag in the Tehri district of Uttarakhand. These news snippets have become a norm, keeping in mind the aggravated nature of mountainsides being blasted off and cleared to make way for the Char Dham highway (a Ministry of Road Transports and Highways project which aims to widen about 900 km of highways connecting Yamunotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath, Badrinath, and the Tanakpur-Pithoragarh). Needless to say, that an approximate number of 50,000 trees are to be felled for the Char Dham project. The trees which Bahuguna Ji protected as the slow-growing, high-altitude ones like deodar or the Himalayan cedar, birch, and oak are under attack but we can make do with false condolences and make-belief obeisance to the dead. According to C.P. Rajendran, professor of Geodynamics at the Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced

Scientific Research, "the annual carbon sequestration by the forests of western and northeastern Himalaya and protective cover for the catchments of the Bhagirathi, Alaknanda and Mandakini valleys - a first line of defence against erosion - are just two important ecosystem services rendered by Himalayan forests."

But do these things matter, when we can tweet, mourn, or cry out loud. The loss is much greater and scarier, amidst the climate change and environmental disasters we are yet to witness. Whatever the man stood for and the direction of his celebrated work or activities has been a contrarian voice on the government's unapologetic developmental activities and its rampant use of Himalayan terrain as a plaything.

Can we keep up the legacy of a man like Sunderlal Bahuguna, or we can simply watch a relay of actions that will subsequently serve as a lamentation over the loss of the Himalayan terrain and its ecology?

## Gautam Adani closes in on net worth of Asia's richest man Mukesh Ambani

*Adani Group founder and chairman Gautam Adani has overtaken Chinese billionaire Zhong Shanshan to become Asia's second richest person and is only behind Reliance Industries Limited (RIL) Chairman Mukesh Ambani.*

Adani Group founder and chairman Gautam Adani is just a few billion dollars away from surpassing the net worth of India's richest man, Mukesh Ambani.

Gautam Adani on Thursday overtook Chinese billionaire Zhong Shanshan to become Asia's second richest person and is only behind Reliance Industries Limited (RIL) Chairman Mukesh Ambani.

With a net worth of \$67.6 billion, Gautam Adani has also become the 14th richest businessman in the world, just a position below Mukesh Ambani, who has a net worth of \$76.3 billion.

Gautam Adani's net worth is

\$8.7 billion lower than Mukesh Ambani, according to a calculation based on data on the Bloomberg Billionaires Index.

Adani's wealth has grown by over \$1 billion in a day on Thursday, following which he surpassed Shanshan. On the contrary, Mukesh Ambani's net worth has fallen by \$222 million. CAN GAUTAM ADANI BECOME INDIA'S RICHEST MAN?

Considering the rapid growth of Adani Group companies in 2021, it would not be a surprise if Gautam Adani surpasses Mukesh Ambani's net worth soon. According to the

Bloomberg Billionaires Index, Gautam Adani's net worth has surged by \$33.8 billion in 2021, while Ambani has lost \$398 million.

Though these valuations can change very quickly, the current trend gives Adani a good chance of overtaking Mukesh Ambani to become India's and Asia's richest businessman.

In terms of wealth addition in 2021, Adani's \$33.8 billion wealth surge is the third-highest on the Bloomberg Billionaires Index after Miriam Adelson (\$34.5 billion) and Bernard Arnault (\$47.6 billion).

Therefore, Gautam Adani is way ahead of top billionaires like Jeff



Bezos and Elon Musk in terms of wealth creation this year. One of the major reason behind Adani's surging net worth is the continued rise in market capitalisation of his six companies - Adani Enterprises, Adani Green, Adani Total Gas, Adani Power, Adani Gas and Adani

Transmission. These companies had a combined market capitalisation of over Rs 8 trillion on Thursday.

It is also worth mentioning that Adani Group's market capitalisation has almost doubled since the beginning of 2021, while Ambani's RIL has seen a decline of 3.6 per cent in m-cap.



# Let's go to explore a magical place

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FARMS & RESORTS



# How a Third Reconstruction could end American poverty



The leaders of the Poor Peoples' Campaign, Rev. William Barber II and Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis, Democratic US Reps. Barbara Lee, Pramila Jayapal and other Congressional backers of the new House resolution titled the Third Reconstruction, are doing the Lord's work, not only in scriptural terms to lift the poor but in patriotic terms to fulfill America's founding credo that we are all created equal. Their call for a third reconstruction is as pragmatically achievable as it is morally right. The resolution, released last Thursday and subtitled "fully addressing poverty and low wages from the bottom up," calls on Congress to recognize that it is a "moral abomination" that there are more

than 140 million Americans "who are poor, low-wealth or one emergency away from economic ruin" and to recognize that the US federal budget is a "moral document that exposes the priorities and values" of the nation.

The truth is that what the third reconstruction advocates in economic policy already exists in Canada, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden and many more countries, just not in the United States. These countries, whether led by governments of the center-right (as in Germany, Netherlands, and Norway) or the center-left (as in Canada, Denmark, Finland and Sweden), believe that all citizens should

live dignified lives free of economic deprivation.

In Europe such economies go by the name "social market" or "social democracy." Yet these terms, so common there, are little used and even less understood in the US. Right-wing news outlets like Fox News and the Wall Street Journal spread misinformation about social inclusion by labeling such mainstream ideas as "socialism," and thereby spread fear among poorly informed Americans.

Socially inclusive economies work like this. Every child gets a good chance in life with publicly provided health care, childcare, and quality education. Every worker gets a decent wage through union-backed collective bargaining and public labor standards, including vacation time, family leave and sick leave. Citizens are encouraged to vote, and voter registration is easy if not automatic. People work productively but with moderation; they like their leisure and family time too. The social democracies collect more government revenues as a share of national

income than in the US, enabling government to reduce inequalities and to provide quality public services and infrastructure.

The US ranks lower than many socially inclusive economies on every key dimension of life, with a lower life expectancy, higher poverty rate, no guaranteed paid sick leave, longer working hours per year, and, yes, less happiness. Herein lies the case for America's third reconstruction. The first, 1865-1877, followed the Civil War. For a brief period, freed slaves enjoyed suffrage in the defeated Confederate states and used their political power to establish public education in the South for the first time. The first reconstruction was brutally cut short by the return to power of White supremacists, who implemented an apartheid-type regime to re-subjugate African Americans through vagrancy laws, lynchings, forced labor and racial terror. The second reconstruction was the Civil Rights movement of the 1940s to 1960s, which dismantled most of the race-based legal structures yet failed to fully uproot the racism that had underpinned this era. The

second reconstruction was followed by the Republican Party's swing to the right under Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan, and the mass incarceration of young Black men as a new form of slavery (the documentary "13th" offers a scathing exposé). Social democracy is based on the proposition that all citizens are equal before the law and in the market economy. Yet from the start, America has been in a non-stop struggle over that supposedly very-American proposition. The original drafters of the Constitution did not implement a system that included racial or gender equality. Rather, the institutions they crafted enslaved the African Americans, oversaw ethnic cleansing and genocides against the Native Americans and left women without suffrage or legal rights. As later immigrants arrived, the White elites tried to attract some to their side through the politics of White supremacy, while others -- based on their race, religion, and geographic origin -- were pushed into the large underclass of the poor and peoples of color.

## The China threat is real and big business is a sellout. Here's what Congress must do now



This week the Senate is debating legislation to improve our competitiveness with respect to China. The goal is a fine one. But shoveling money to left wing research institutes won't achieve it. We must take action to empower our own workers while holding China accountable. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) represents an existential threat to the United States. There is broad, bipartisan agreement on this challenge. For decades, China has seized our intellectual property, flooded our country

with cheap imports, gutted our industrial base, stolen our jobs, and lured American corporations abroad. With American dollars and technology, they've financed a regional and global strategy bent on domination.

China has built its military on the backs of our working class and they appear increasingly willing to use it.

We must be clear-eyed on how we got to this point. China's assertiveness and persistent predation are only part of the picture. For decades, experts in

Washington have enabled the CCP with policy choices that have left our workers out to dry and empowered multi-national corporations to pursue profit at the expense of everything else. The real sellouts to China are mega billion-dollar corporations that are obsessively wedded to the Chinese market. From Big Tech to Wall Street to Nike, the NBA, and Disney, big business is embracing the values of the CCP. Several multi-national corporations have allegedly taken advantage of forced labor in China and elsewhere, effectively choosing slaves over American workers.

This is shameful. It is wrong. And it holds our country back.

Just this week, we saw new reports describing how Apple, America's wealthiest company, has caved to the Chinese government time and again. After years of pumping money into China, now Apple is doing the CCP's bidding. To appease China, Apple won't even call the iPhone an American product

anymore.

Any bill from Congress that focuses on our competitiveness with China must ensure that U.S.-based corporations are required to shift their focus back to where it belongs: American workers and American values. There are strong steps that Congress can take to cut China down to size. It starts with addressing slave labor and the multi-national corporations that enable it to persist abroad. We know that in the Chinese province of Xinjiang, for example, the Uyghur Muslim minority has been forced into concentration camps and their labor exploited by Chinese state-backed businesses, both in Xinjiang and elsewhere. This cheap, forced labor is a big reason why China has become a production powerhouse. I'm offering proposals this week to put our workers first. To address slave labor, we should enact a punitive import tariff of 100 percent on all goods that are produced in Xinjiang or that contain materials

that originate from that province. Second, big corporations based in America should be required to certify that their entire supply chain is "slave free" or face stiff penalties.

Then, we should require that all goods originating from a country believed to be a source for forced labor by the Department of Labor be marked as such.

Will Nike be able to sell as many shoes if the label says they come from a place suspected of slave labor? This is how we can change corporate behavior.

If enacted, these measures could be transformative. By purging slave labor from our supply chains, we can isolate China economically and limit its access to rich American firms that fuel its aggression in the Indo-Pacific. And by protecting our domestic industry from exploited labor, we will empower our own workers and create jobs. China cannot hope to compete with American workers on a level playing field.



# What George Floyd Changed

***The protests over one man's death touched far more aspects of American life than just criminal justice. Seven thinkers reflect on how America is (and isn't) different now.***

In the year since George Floyd died under the knee of a Minneapolis police officer, the explosive waves of national protest that followed have taken on almost a settled meaning: They were calls for police reform, and for America to take a hard look at the racial injustice threaded through its civic life. But in its breadth and impact, the reaction to Floyd's killing also blew through any conventional expectations for what a "protest" might touch. The reckoning it prompted about race in America extended to workplaces, classrooms, legislatures; it shook the worlds of art, literature and media. Americans began to talk about their own history differently. They physically pulled down monuments. The waves crashed against the fence of the White House, and rippled overseas. POLITICO Magazine asked a range of thinkers to reflect on the surprising ways that Floyd's death reshaped the country-and what hasn't changed, too. They

noted that many Americans, including political leaders, now talk about race and racism in blunter, more honest ways, and are more willing to rethink the stories we tell ourselves about who we are. Some cities are physically different, perhaps permanently. Of course, in some cases, they said, the way we talk might be all that's changed, and not so much the way we act. A year later, a police officer is guilty of murder, but Black people have continued to die. And the next chapter has yet to be written. Erin Aubry Kaplan is a journalist in Los Angeles and a contributing opinion writer for the New York Times. Up until a year ago, the words "systemic racism," and the reality they represent, were toxic to many Americans-a sweeping indictment of a nation that even the most liberal white people preferred to see as a glass half full. Then George Floyd was murdered. What had been an abstract argument made in numbers and percentages by a

cadre of activists and academics became impossible to deny. The dam of resistance burst, and "systemic racism"-the idea and the phrase itself-went mainstream practically overnight. Everybody from NPR to Wall Street embraced the notion, incorporating it into their reporting and advertising.

Joe Biden did something no presidential nominee, or winner, had done: He used the phrase "systemic racism" in his convention speech-and again on election night, and again in his inaugural address.

It might sound superficial to make so much of one phrase, but the implications are profound. Even many of those who still think the term goes too far are acknowledging that America's ugly past has finally caught up to the present, and the present is reshaping our political future. This tectonic shift in public sentiment about race reminds me of what a friend and fellow journalist always told me when I



despaired about the snail's pace of social progress in America: The status quo is the status quo, until it changes. It is possible for big change to happen overnight. That's the good news. The bad news is that the nation's racist past that was never really past has also burst into view again. The George Floyd awakening was countered by a presidential election that the Republican Party, increasingly clinging to Donald Trump, declared illegitimate after voters of color had gone to the polls in record numbers. In January, mobs of mostly white people stormed and desecrated the U.S. Capitol because of a total unwillingness to accept any electoral outcome except the one they felt entitled

to. A fundamental schism has emerged between those who believe white supremacy in America is still perfectly feasible, even moral, and those who believe it is deeply anti-American and are determined to put it to rest once and for all. It's the Big Lie versus the Big Truth. The George Floyd protests have highlighted that there is no middle ground in this battle, as there never should have been. It's ironic-but very instructive-that the systemic racism that used to be so hard to see, or to name, is now visible every day, in ongoing police shootings of Black people, but also in the words and actions of elected officials across the country. At least we all know now which side we're on.

## The Most Embarrassing Revelations in Apple's Antitrust Trial



The antitrust lawsuit filed against Apple by Epic, the video game company behind Fortnite, is wrapping up with its final arguments on Monday in a federal court in Oakland, California. At the heart of the case is Apple's policy requiring that its payment system process all in-app purchases on its mobile devices, a setup that typically nets the device maker a 30 percent commission. After negotiations between the two companies about this fee fell

apart, Epic decided to charge ahead with a Fortnite update in August that allowed players to buy the in-game currency known as V-bucks (at a discount) without going through Apple, a stunt that also included a "1984" parody ad mocking Apple and a #FreeFortnite hashtag intended to stir up a user backlash against the company. Apple booted Fortnite from the App Store-blocking updates and leaving just a rump version of the game on iOS-which led Epic to sue. At

stake is Apple's control over the iPhone and the iPad-not just how much money is made there, but also what apps are allowed on the devices, period. (Epic has ambitions to create a large online gaming store, which it would like to extend to iOS.) Thus, the trial wasn't just an opportunity to work through technical arguments about software and antitrust law. It was also a rare, behind-the-scenes, and often unflattering peek at how Apple wields power, and how an ambitious potential competitor is trying to chip away at it. Here are some of the most striking, surprising, and occasionally flat-out awkward details about Apple and Epic that were uncovered through the proceedings.

The Biggest Known iPhone Hack As part of discovery, Apple released emails that surfaced worrying details about the largest known iPhone hack to date. In September 2015, researchers notified managers at the

company that 2,500 apps containing malicious code had been downloaded 203 million times by 128 million iPhone users. (Further investigation would later reveal that 4,000 apps had been affected.) Of the victims, 18 million were in the U.S. and more than half were in China. Hackers were able to create a counterfeit version of Apple's Xcode app development tool that deployed the malicious code and prompted iPhones to divulge information like device identifiers and network info. In the emails, Apple's managers discuss steps for notifying all the affected users via email, which is best practice for data breaches and often mandated by state law. However, it doesn't seem that Apple ever ended up sending that email. Instead, it published a blog post that vaguely outlined how the hack worked and only disclosed the 25 most popular apps that had the malicious code. The post has since been taken down, and it

wasn't until this year that the public learned just how many iPhone users the hack had managed to reach.

Sisterly Lust

During the first week of the trial, Epic brought up the indie games marketplace Itch.io, which is accessible through the Epic Games Store. Epic is trying to get Apple to also host competitors' online stores, so the video game company was demonstrating that it already walks its talk with Itch.io. However, Apple's attorney Karen Dunn sought to show how such an arrangement could be a liability. While questioning the general manager of the Epic Games Store, Steven Allison, Dunn brought up a title on Itch.io called Sisterly Lust. The game is essentially a dating simulator in which the main character engages in graphic sexual relationships with his estranged mother and sisters after the death of his father.



# Behind \$500 billion investment ad, property firm with a chequered past

**On Monday morning, Indians woke up to an unbelievable advertisement from a purported US-based firm, offering "first phase of investment" worth \$500 billion.**

In 2014, the Joint Statement between India and the United States governments officially set a goal of achieving shared bilateral trade worth \$500 billion. Since then, both countries have come a long way but still stand far from achieving that goal. However, on Monday morning, Indians woke up to an unbelievable advertisement from a purported US-based firm, offering "first phase of investment" worth \$500 billion. The conspicuous advertisement published on behalf of "Landomus Realty Ventures Inc" in several editions of a national newspaper was directly addressed to the Prime Minister of India. However, digital footprints of the firm's past records cast doubt on its track record and business promises.

## BUSINESS OF LAND BANKING

Although the newspaper

advertisement was published in the name of a Landomus USA, the company is also registered with Registrar of Companies, Bangalore. India Today TV visited the registered address of the firm in Bengaluru but did not find its offices at the location. Even the people who had offices nearby did not recognize the company.

Corporate papers filed in the US, show that the US firm Landomus Realty Ventures was registered on February 2, 2017. The company in India was registered almost two years prior, in July 2015. The Indian firm has not filed its annual returns. While its current website doesn't provide much information about its business activities, an archived version of its website shows, that the company was involved in the business of Land Banking.

"Land Banking is the practice

of aggregating land parcels at strategic locations for future sale or development and there by realizing high appreciation of investment," an archived page of Landomus website, from 2018 that has since been deleted, read. Its 2018 statement said that THE company's primary focus was to create "REAL WEALTH" through land banking strategy in the US and India; however, its current website is dedicated to "Building a Covid Free and a Prosperous India".

Another archived page of its website that has now been removed, claimed that Landomus offered a target compound annual growth rate ("CAGR") of 34.93 per cent to its investors in their plans to raise \$25,000,000. However, the current webpage of the company doesn't tell if the company ever fulfilled its promises.



**THE PROPERTY EXPERTS**  
According to domain registration data, the current website of Landomus USA has been registered by Karnataka-based United Land Bank (ULB). Archived digital records suggest that ULB was founded by S Pradeep Kumar, the chairman of Landomus and the man behind the newspaper advertisement. ULB acted as a consultant and facilitator to procure land and properties in Bangalore and Mysore. "ULB's founders are now taking the firm global offering to serve as a facilitator for NRIs (non-resident Indians) and foreign nationals of Indian origin looking to

investment in Bangalore's lucrative real estate market," its 2017 website read.

The website has since become defunct, and it doesn't have a physical presence at the Bengaluru address; suggesting that the company's business has been scrapped. There is evidence to show that the website of UBL was live between years 2010 to 2018. Back then, Kumar called himself a property market expert who had "played a crucial role in the success of many a number of giant real estate projects in the city of Bangalore". However, its project page did not identify any known ventures.

## Mystery US firm wants to invest \$500 billion in India. Twitter laughs it off



A little-known US firm has claimed that it wants to invest \$500 billion (over Rs 36 lakh crore) in India. The chairman of the firm has made an appeal to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to provide an opportunity to contribute to the 'New India' vision.

The firm, Landomus Realty Ventures, said it wants to invest the amount into the National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP) and non-NIP projects listed by the government under the India investment grid for the 'Invest India' initiative.

The company expressed its interest to invest in India by

making an appeal to Prime Minister Narendra Modi through a front-page ad in a prominent newspaper.

"Landomus Realty Ventures Inc., USA, would like to invest USD 500 Billion in Equity as first phase of investment into the National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP) and Non-NIP projects listed by the Government of India under the India Investment Grid for 'Invest India' initiative," Landomus Group Chairman Pradeep Kumar Satyaprakash said in the advertisement.

"Landomus Realty Ventures aims to make India a global destination by supporting the

*A mystery US firm has expressed its interest to invest \$500 billion in India. It has also made an appeal to Prime Minister Narendra Modi through a front-page ad in a prominent newspaper. However, many people on Twitter found the company's proposition hard to believe.*

completion of NIP and non-NIP projects along with investors and developers under the India Investment Grid in sectors such as energy, social infrastructure, manufacturing, transport, food processing and agriculture, water and sanitation," Satyaprakash added. The company's chairman also said that the group aims to assist the government in its endeavour to "rebuild India and achieve the USD 5 trillion GDP target.

At the end of the advertisement, the firm mentioned: "We have a concrete plan to make India pandemic free and request you to provide us an opportunity to present our plan".

## TWITTER FINDS IT HARD TO BELIEVE

As noble as the company's intentions might sound, nobody has ever heard of Landomus Group before - something you would expect from a company

with the capacity to invest \$500 billion.

To put the amount in context, \$500 billion is more than the combined net worth of Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, Tesla Chief Elon Musk and Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates. And in the Indian context, the amount (Rs 36 lakh crore) is more than the government's full expenditure budget for FY22.

Many prominent people on Twitter found it hard to believe, citing the shoddy website of the company and the massive amount it is willing to invest all of a sudden.

While some called it a joke, others called it a way to grab attention. A Twitter user said, "Landomus Realty ventures inc has 19 people and makes \$5 million revenue. How can they invest USD \$500 billion in India? What kind of joke is this? Govt should take serious action

against them for this ad mischief."

"How to grab attention in India? Print a front-page ad addressing government and mention big numbers! A \$5 million company committing to invest \$2 trillion in India! Pure attention seekers," another Twitter user said.

Some users were quick to point that the company, which claims to be based in the US, has been registered in Bengaluru. A search of its website domain revealed that it was registered by United Land Bank, located in Karnataka, in 2015.

The company's one-page website did not reveal much except a few lines on its "Build India" mission and an "Our team" section. What many Twitter users found odd was that the website did not even have an 'our history' section.



# "Will Only Work With Centre," Says Pfizer As States' Vaccine Bids Falter

**American companies Pfizer and Moderna have turned down requests to supply Delhi and Punjab with their vaccines - both citing official policy.**

States scrambling to buy Covid vaccines directly from foreign manufacturers - to boost what they say is insufficient supply from the centre - seem to be running into a roadblock in some cases, with at least two pharmaceutical giants refusing to sell to them.

American companies Pfizer and Moderna have turned down requests to supply Delhi and Punjab with their vaccines. Both cited official policy and said they would only deal with the centre. "Pfizer will supply COVID-19 vaccines only to central governments for deployment in national immunisation programmes. Allocation of doses and implementation plan within a country is a decision for local governments based on relevant health authority guidelines," the company said.

The company also said discussions with the centre - to roll out its vaccine in India - were "ongoing". Emergency use approval for the drug has been held up, news agency Reuters reported last week, over Pfizer's demands for legal indemnity from claims linked to its product.

Moderna is understood to have made similar demands for legal

protection. The company is also believed to have told states that even if it could deal with them, it does not have spare stocks.

Vaccine supplies have become a sore subject in India, with several states insisting they do not have enough doses to vaccinate both age groups - 18-44 and 45+ - but the centre insisting they do.

The result has been some states shutting down vaccination centres or suspending inoculation for the 18-44 demographic. Delhi did just that on Monday - closing 400 sites to that group.

Earlier in the year, states flagging this issue petitioned the centre to be allowed to buy directly from manufacturers. From May 1 they were allowed to do so - as part of a new "liberalised" policy.

The centre - heavily criticised over vaccinations - said it would supply 50 per cent of doses.

Supply of the rest, it effectively said, would be the problem of individual states, triggering a potential bidding war and stand-

off over vaccines, much like with oxygen over the past weeks.

Since then, seven states and UTs - Uttar Pradesh, Kerala, Karnataka, Punjab, Haryana, Tamil Nadu and Delhi - have floated global tenders. The Mumbai civic body also took the import route and has had some success, having received three bids for the supply of Russia's Sputnik V.



Some others - particularly those ruled by the BJP or its allies - have decided against importing vaccines. Assam, where the party is in power, described the tenders as "just publicity".

Around 15.5 crore doses have been sought from abroad. UP leads the queue with four crore doses, Tamil Nadu wants 3.5, Kerala three, Karnataka two, and Punjab, Haryana and Delhi one each.



BIONTECH

While states have not yet closed the tender process (UP has, in fact, extended it), Pfizer and Moderna's replies suggest buying from manufacturers will be difficult, particularly since many have already committed to nations that, some argue, had the foresight to order in advance and in bulk. The companies approached include Pfizer, Moderna, Johnson & Johnson and the makers of Sputnik. Of these only Sputnik is currently approved for use in India, meaning that even if a deal were to be struck, it will still require the national drug regulator to sign off.

Kerala has already made that point, insisting that any supplier needs to have been DCGI (Drug Controller General India) approval before being considered for supply of vaccines to the state. Another issue - particularly for Pfizer - is that of legal indemnity, which can only be granted by the

centre, meaning, as with regulatory approvals, the centre could torpedo any deal.

The centre, therefore, has to clear Pfizer, Moderna and other vaccines before states can buy them, assuming that they will be able to convince the companies to deal directly with them.

India currently has three vaccines - Covishield (developed by AstraZeneca-Oxford University), Covaxin (developed by Bharat Biotech) and Sputnik V.

All three have waived indemnity and are already supplying states directly. Meanwhile, questions were raised this morning after the centre told the Kerala High Court that 8.5 crore doses of Covishield and Covaxin were being produced per month in India. The daily vaccination rate, however, is between 12 and 13 lakhs - less than 60 per cent of the number of vaccine doses produced in the country every 24 hours.

## "More Information" Required: WHO On Emergency Use Listing Of Bharat Biotech's Covaxin

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has said that more information is required from Bharat Biotech, which is seeking emergency use listing (EUL) for its Covaxin vaccine for COVID-19.

The latest status of COVID-19 Vaccines within WHO EUL/PQ evaluation process' guidance document dated May 18 on the WHO website said Bharat Biotech submitted EOI (Expression of Interest) on April 19 and that More information required. A pre-submission meeting is expected to be planned May-June 2021, the guidance document said.

According to the WHO, submissions to it for prequalification or listing under

the emergency use procedure are confidential.

If a product submitted for assessment is found to meet the criteria for listing, WHO will publish the results widely. Duration of the emergency use listing process depends on the quality of the data submitted by the vaccine manufacturer and on those data meeting WHO criteria, according to the agency.

Meanwhile, Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech International Limited (BBIL) has conveyed to the government that it has already submitted 90 per cent of documents to WHO for obtaining emergency use listing (EUL) for the Covaxin vaccine, sources said in New Delhi on Monday.

The remaining documents are

expected to be submitted by June, the Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech Ltd told the Central government during a discussion on obtaining the World Health Organisation's authorisation for emergency use listing for Covaxin, sources said. "BBIL is confident about obtaining WHO's emergency use listing," said a source.

Noting that Covaxin has already received regulatory approval from 11 countries, sources said there was also interest from other 11 companies in seven nations for technology transfer and production of Covaxin.

The company is in the final stages of negotiations with the Food and Drug Administration of the US for conducting small-scale



phase-III clinical trials of Covaxin in the United States, sources said.

Sources said the meeting with BBIL on the EUL was attended by the company's managing director V Krishna Mohan and his colleagues besides senior

officers of the Ministry of Health, Department of Biotechnology and Ministry of External Affairs.

Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla was among those who attended the meeting.



# \$STOPELON: A new coin to 'destroy' Elon Musk's influence on cryptocurrencies

*A new meme cryptocurrency \$STOPELON has been created by a set of crypto traders who are upset with Tesla CEO Elon Musk. The creators said that the cryptocurrency will not be impacted by Elon Musk's "irresponsible" tweets.*

Cryptocurrency investors are not happy with Tesla CEO and billionaire Elon Musk. After Wednesday's crash, many cryptocurrency traders are upset with the 49-year-old and blame his recent tweets for the rout observed in the crypto market.

Upset with Musk's "irresponsible manipulation" of cryptocurrencies, a new virtual coin has been minted. It has been named \$STOPELON. The cryptocurrency has emerged just this week and the price has increased over 4,000 per cent in just a day - from \$0.0000019 to \$0.00009450.

The currency has been created on the blockchain Binance Smart Chain and is currently

trading at around \$0.00005600 with a market capitalisation of nearly \$30 billion, according to a chart site cited by BusinessToday.in.

On the website of the new cryptocurrency, created by miffed crypto traders, it is written that \$STOPELON is "a community created to destroy the biggest market manipulator of them all."

Though it seems to be another meme coin and serves no apparent purpose, it seems that the virtual coin has been created with the intention of expressing dissent against the Tesla CEO while making money.

It may be noted that a recent series of tweets by Elon Musk had damaging effects on

Bitcoin, which has crashed sharply over the past few weeks. When Musk first tweeted that Tesla will not accept Bitcoin as payment, the cryptocurrency sank almost 17 per cent.

Musk's tweet also had a devastating impact on other cryptos such as Dogecoin - a meme virtual coin that shot to fame earlier this year after Musk tweeted backing it. Its rise had made a fortune for many before it tanked sharply on Wednesday along with all other cryptos.

The creators of \$STOPELON claim that the price of the virtual coin will not be "controlled" by Musk's tweets.

'NARCISSISTIC BILLIONAIRE'



On the official website of \$STOPELON, the message read: "Elon Musk is infamous for irresponsibly manipulating the cryptocurrency market with his Twitter account. Just recently, he did it again, causing a massive crash across all frontiers when he tweeted that Tesla will cease to accept Bitcoin as payment. Anyone with even a shred of critical thinking sees through his lies. He has been trying to pump

crypto for ages, tweeting about it to no end, and even going to Saturday Night Live as a final resort to get Dogecoin up! It's ridiculous!" "He's toying with people's portfolio like candy, like the narcissistic billionaire he is and always will be. We say ENOUGH. Hence, we created \$STOPELON. Where we get rich, without anyone controlling our fate except ourselves. All you have to do is BUY and HODL."

## Rupee becomes Asia's top-performing currency in May as Covid crisis wanes



*The rupee has become Asia's top-performing currency in May after it fell to a nine-month in April. Experts said the recovery in rupee is a reflection of improving Covid-19 situation in India.*

After being hit hard by the second wave of Covid-19, the rupee has staged a strong comeback as it rebounded to become Asia's top-performing currency in May. The rebound is a likely result of improving

Covid-19 situation in the country.

The Indian currency has climbed at least 1.5 per cent against the US dollar in May, and it has beat all other Asian currencies,

reported

Bloomberg. The development comes as India's daily Covid-19 cases continue to drop after touching a record high. The rupee also has the benefit of offering Asia's highest carry returns, added the report.

The rise of the rupee is a direct reflection of India's efforts to tackle the second wave, indicating the local lockdowns in most parts of the country have helped limit daily cases in May. While a stronger

currency is a sign that the Covid-19 situation in the country is improving, it is also a worrisome sign for exporters, especially at a time when the economy has lost recovery momentum. An analyst who spoke to the publication said that the Reserve Bank of India may step in at some stage to limit the rupee's gains.

It may be noted that the rupee tumbled to the lowest value in nine months in April when India

was reporting record high Covid-19 cases. In contrast, there has been a sharp drop in the number of daily cases in the past few days. Today, daily cases have dropped below the two-lakh mark after a long time. According to Barclays note, the rupee is like to climb to 72.50 per dollar by next quarter from around 73 now due to supportive flows and attractive valuations. Lack of intervention from the RBI could also play a role, it added.

## Covid Fears Paralyse Global Carmakers In India's Detroit

*The face-off between automakers and workers underscores the struggle for companies and local authorities to balance economic interests with public health demands.*

Automakers with plants in Tamil Nadu, the industry's hub in India, are suspending operations and reducing shifts as employees threaten to go on strike due to health concerns about Covid-19 in the southern state.

Renault Nissan Automotive India Pvt. is caught in a legal dispute with workers at its factory near

Chennai, nicknamed the Detroit of India, who say their safety shouldn't be compromised to meet production targets. The workers have also challenged the state's decision to exempt the auto industry from local lockdown rules.

In response to the lawsuit at the Madras High Court, Renault Nissan said it has taken

necessary precautions to safeguard employees, including reducing daily shifts to two from three and arranging for transport and vaccinations. The company said it needs to keep the plant running -- and is allowed to under local laws -- as it has a commitment to meet export orders.

Hyundai Motor India Ltd. has



suspended operations in Chennai until May 29 after a spike in infections and a walkout employees," it said in a statement. The company "has



## Huma Qureshi Makes A Stellar Monochrome Statement One Outfit At A Time

Is there any look that Huma Qureshi cannot slay? Huma Qureshi decided to channel monochrome, summer fashion looks in a shirt dress from the brand Zwaan. The actress has amped up her fashion game and we are loving her summer styles like never before! Wearing a ravishing red shirt dress that featured a thigh-high

slit, she knew how to add that extra character to her snazzy look. Paired with a pair of stilettos, a high-knot bun and minimal makeup, the Huma slayed the look like the glam boss that she is. Riding high on this style quotient, we are very sure that Huma Qureshi is the one to answer most of our style woes!

## How To Wear The Cool Summer Girl Aesthetics: Fashion Trends That We're Loving



Keeping the balance between looking cool and feeling cool is a summer challenge even the most stylish of women are bound to encounter. Summer brings with it some amazing styles. Much to our excitement, it seems as though the sun is finally here to stay, but we're desperately in need of some brand-new outfit inspiration to get us back into the summertime mood. And currently, the Y2k summer fashion trends are

living in our minds rent-free, and most of us are already obsessed with it. Without too much effort, you can achieve the perfect summer style. These summer style choices are bound towards more risqué outfits giving cultural and empowering messages too. We've rounded up five chic and cool summer styles that will definitely help you ace the sizzling summer girl aesthetics like an absolute pro!

## What Is The Future Of Dressing Up Once The Pandemic Is Over?



The pandemic has put a hold on how we dress and surely affects when we head out too. We all love a reason to get dressed up; doing your hair and makeup just to sit inside on Zoom

the situation gets better, once we venture out and once this pandemic is actually over? We decode five trends and how we dress up may take a turn in the future.



## Padma Lakshmi Is "Still Not Over" Her Gorgeous Pantsuit From Last Night And Neither Are We



The Billboard Music Awards 2021 may have taken place a day ago but it seems like Padma Lakshmi isn't ready to get over it just yet. After all, it's a refreshing change to be at an awards function in these times so we feel her. In her latest post on Instagram, the TV personality and author posted a video of herself getting dressed up for the function with the caption "Still not over last night's 'lewk'". She looked so incredible, it was practically impossible to get over a gorgeous red carpet look like this.



## Without Remorse movie review:

# Magnetic Michael B Jordan can't save Amazon's flimsy franchise-starter

**Without Remorse movie review: Michael B Jordan stars in director Stefano Sollima's franchise-starter, out on Amazon Prime Video.**

A lot of people watched Sicario, but no one was more impressed by the film than director Stefano Sollima, who has since dedicated his career to mimicking it. Not only did Sollima direct the actual sequel - Sicario: Day of the Soldado - but he also brought the same, spare style to his terrific crime series ZeroZeroZero, and now, to Amazon's Without Remorse. But what worked marvellously in the past has proven to be the absolute worst approach this time around. Sollima's minimalist style simply doesn't translate to Tom Clancy's maximalist world - the Ryanverse. He has dealt with themes of institutional corruption before, but he puts that on the back burner in Without Remorse, a film that is stitched together by a series of action set pieces with the barest hints of a plot. As an action director, his bare-bones style

leaves a lot to be desired. In many ways, Sollima represents the utopian ideal of what many, including myself, often desire of mainstream Hollywood - filmmaking that refuses to conform to familiar old tricks. But there's a reason why Nicolas Winding Refn never actually directed a James Bond film, despite having come very close at one point - as tantalising as the prospect might sound, finding a common ground between his arthouse sensibilities and Bond's bombast would have been too wide a chasm to cross.

The closest analogy I can think of also involves Refn, and his 2011 cult classic Drive. Marketed as an action-heist film in the vein of the Fast & Furious franchise, the film earned a 'C-' CinemaScore from audiences, despite glowing critical reviews. An angry woman actually filed a lawsuit against the distributor for

the 'misleading' trailer that they cut. I can imagine baffled Boomers tuning into Without Remorse and contemplating legal action as well. Not because it's bad - it isn't; it's mediocre - but because it really isn't what you'd expect.

A blatant attempt to appeal to a younger demographic - as has become rather common these days, the protagonist has been racially overhauled here - Without Remorse bears little resemblance to Clancy's Cold War thrillers. Michael B Jordan stars as John Clark, the writer's second most popular character, after Jack Ryan, who has a series that airs on the same streamer. Previously played on film by Willem Dafoe and Liev Schreiber, John Clark gets an origin story in Without Remorse. It establishes, in its opening scene, not only his formidable physicality, but also his



ideology. We watch as multiple members of his SEAL team are assassinated one by one, in abruptly structured scenes. When they come for Clark, they find his pregnant wife instead. Her brutal murder compels him to go rogue. This might seem like a tired trope in spy thrillers, but it's really radical, if you consider it in an Indian context. While our industry has virtually made it impossible to question institutions, here's a movie, muddled as it might be, that features a protagonist who not only actively turns his back on his nation, but also questions how men and women like him have

been exploited by it. "I'll show them what a pawn can do to a king," he says in one scene, before unleashing a tirade of vengeful violence that attracts the attention of the President and his cronies.

But Without Remorse, before being dumped on Amazon, appears to have been designed as a PG-13 film. There is violence - the movie devotes more time to gunfights than actual conversations - but it's all very sanitised. The pacing, meanwhile, makes it seem like an assembly cut - not at all elegant like its protagonist, but almost mechanical.

## The Disciple movie review:

# A demanding drama from master-in-the-making Chaitanya Tamhane

**The Disciple movie review: Director Chaitanya Tamhane's new film, out on Netflix, is a demanding drama about obsession; another major step in the creative evolution of one of India's most promising young filmmakers.**



The music in The Disciple brings to mind that scene from La La Land, in which Ryan Gosling's Seb, a lifelong devotee, explains jazz to Emma Stone's Mia, who thinks of it as elevator music. "It's not relaxing," Seb says, on the verge of losing it. "It's conflict, and it's compromise, and it's new, every time. It's very, very exciting." There are several scenes in The Disciple, director Chaitanya Tamhane's second feature film, in which discerning crowds gather to watch a performance of Indian classical

music. They bob their heads gently, their bodies swaying in near-unison to the 'raagas'. I have read foreign journalists who watched the film at the Venice and Toronto International Film Festivals describe the music as 'soothing', mistaking it, perhaps like Mia, for what you'd hear in the lobby of a Taj, or at Saravana Bhawan. It's likely that you're reminded of Damien Chazelle's films while watching this one, obsessed as it is with obsession. But thematically and tonally, Tamhane's follow-up to his modern

masterpiece Court has more in common with Japanese cinema. "Till the age of 40, we didn't think of anything but practice," the aspiring 24-year-old musician Sharad Nerulkar's 'guruji' tells him in one scene, after Sharad displays a hint of impatience. Guruji isn't a hothead like JK Simmons' instructor from Chazelle's Whiplash, but more reserved, like chef Jiro Ono, whose relationship with his son was documented so thoughtfully in Jiro Dreams of Sushi. Guruji's expectations of Sharad aren't dissimilar to what the greatest sushi chefs demand of their apprentices - years of dedication perfecting knife work and rice-making, before they can even attempt crafting the actual dish. Sharad reminded me of director Goro Miyazaki, a man who reluctantly followed in his illustrious father's footsteps, but

learned some time later that he simply wasn't cut out for it. Like Studio Ghibli's internal affairs, succession plays a key role in The Disciple as well. Sharad grew up hearing his father wax lyrical about the legendary Maai, an idealistic singer who refused to perform for crowds, or allow her music to be recorded. One of Maai's disciples was Sharad's own Guruji; this isn't conveyed in as many words, but it's almost as if Sharad believes that he belongs to some sort of holy bloodline. Conquering the world of classical music isn't merely his artistic ambition, but a spiritual quest. He is a samurai, a monk who goes on nighttime bike rides in Mumbai, almost as an act of meditation. On his rides, filmed entirely in slow-motion, he listens to rare recordings of Maai's lectures, in which she speaks about resisting temptation -

Bollywood is but a block away - and the importance of remaining 'lonely and hungry'. Later, when he is getting pictures taken for his website, the photographer asks him to loosen up a little. "Smile, you enjoy singing, don't you?" he asks. The look on Sharad's face suggests that the photographer might as well have asked for his mother's hand in marriage; it's been a while since he 'enjoyed' doing anything. As languidly paced as it is, there is a claustrophobic quality to The Disciple that is hard to ignore. Like its protagonist, the film never takes it easy; Sharad has no friends to speak of, he has no hobbies, no real job, and no interests beyond singing. There's a sense that he's continuing down this demanding path because of an escalation in commitment - he has invested far too much energy into this to turn back around.



## Alia Bhatt to back series spreading awareness about Covid-19 vaccines

Actor-producer Alia Bhatt on Wednesday announced a five-part series as an attempt to disseminate authentic information about Covid-19 vaccines amid "myths and rumours that are exchanged on social media". Titled The Intersection: Vaccinate India, the series is a collaboration between Alia's production house Eternal Sunshine Productions and podcast network Audiomatic.

"Even though the vaccines are here, some of us are still hesitant. A great deal of this hesitancy is due to misinformation, myths and rumours that are exchanged on social media and other messaging platforms,"

the 28-year-old actor says in the video shared on her official Twitter page.

Shared knowledge is our greatest ally in this fight against Covid-19.

Together, @audiomaticIN and @EternalSunProd are bringing to you a 5 part series that can help us understand the Covid-19 vaccines a little better. [pic.twitter.com/VxoKg4GsF0](https://pic.twitter.com/VxoKg4GsF0)

The series is an effort to learn more about the vaccines through "reliable sources and make the most informed choice about getting vaccinated", she said.

The Intersection, which debuts Thursday, will see renowned doctors and global health activists sharing data

and facts around Covid-19 vaccines.

"I hope this series will help address some of your concerns around the vaccines," Alia, who will next be seen in Sanjay Leela Bhansali's Gangubai Kathiawadi, further says in the video.

The first episode of the series will be available in a podcast and video format.

India on Wednesday reported 2,08,921 Covid-19 infections, pushing the overall tally of cases to 2,71,57,795, as the country conducted 22,17,320 coronavirus tests, its highest-ever in a day, according to Union Health Ministry data.

## Hina Khan says she received 'heart-touching message' from Priyanka Chopra after her father's death

Actor Hina Khan has appreciated how Priyanka Chopra treats her and revealed that she received a "heart-touching" message from the Baywatch star after her father died last month. Priyanka and Hina have shared a cordial relationship and have also expressed their gratitude to each other on social media ever since Hina's Cannes debut in 2019.

"Priyanka Chopra, I really like the way she picks these small, little things. I honestly don't want to talk about it, but I want to add a little bit. She is such a busy woman, an entrepreneur, she is doing so many things. She sending me a text message after my father's passing away, and such a long message. Not just a text message where you say 'I am sorry, condolences' and all," Hina told Miss Malini.

Hina added, "(That is) because she understands what it is to

lose a father. That was really special and heart-touching."



Earlier, Hina made her debut at Cannes Film Festival with her film, Lines and had Priyanka as a major support.

They were also seen partying together after the film festival. Talking about how Priyanka made her feel at home, Hina had written in an Instagram post,

"An unexpected invitation by a world star.. personally, after I gained consciousness and prepared my self to finally make it, I was still an outsider but only until you arrived. You didn't need to, but still never left my hand for a second, introduced me to the people I probably wouldn't have met and I felt as

if all the achievements of my little career happening in fast forward as you present me as a star to each one of them.

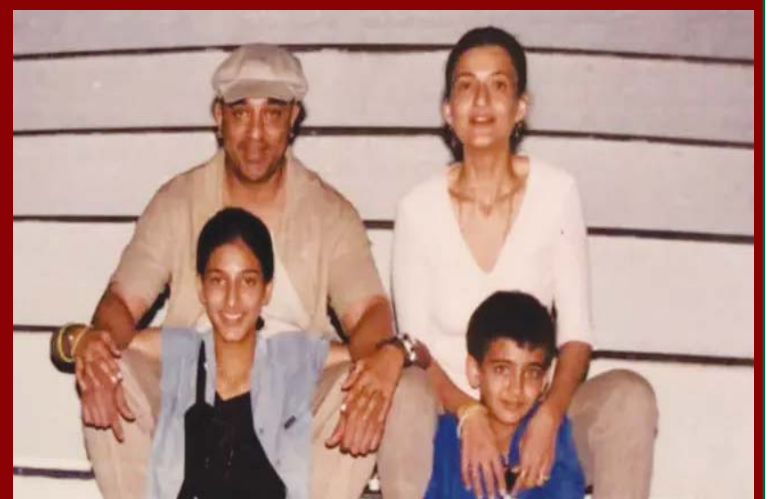


## Shruti Haasan Says That She Is "Glad" Her Parents Kamal Haasan And Sarika Separated

Shruti Haasan, daughter of veteran actors Kamal Haasan and Sarika, in a recent interview with Zoom Digital, talked about her parents' separation and the impact that it had on her. "I was glad they separated as I do not think two people who are not getting along, should be forced to get along for some reason," Shruti told Zoom Digital and added that they "continue to be wonderful parents." During the interview, the actress confessed that she is "particularly close" to her dad. She added, "My mum is doing

well and is a part of our lives as well. They are both uniquely wonderful and beautiful people." Emphasising the importance of individuality, the actress said, "They were not that beautiful together anymore. That does not take away their individual beauty as human beings. When they separated, I was very young, and it was very simple, they were happier apart than they were together." Superstar Kamal Haasan married actress Sarika sometime in the 1980s after dating for several years. Kamal Haasan was earlier married to dancer Vani Ganapathy for about

ten years. They got divorced in 1988. Kamal Haasan and Sarika welcomed their first child Shruti Haasan in 1986. Their second child, Akshara was born to the couple in 1991. Sarika and Kamal Haasan got divorced in 2004. Akshara made her film debut in 2015 with the comedy drama Shamitabh, co-starring Amitabh Bachchan and Dhanush. Shruti Haasan has starred in several Tamil as well as Bollywood films. She stepped into Bollywood with the 2009 film Luck, co-starring Imran Khan. The actress has also been a part of films such as Welcome Back,



Ramaiya Vastavaiya, Dil Toh Bachcha Hai Ji and D-Day among others. She will be seen sharing screen space with Baahubali star Prabhas in a film titled Salaar.



# Come Crisis, Why Does India Wilt and Whimper?



(SAI Bureau)- World's largest democracy with the third largest army, a nuclear power and an IT powerhouse - a mere mention of these attributes, makes most Indians swell with pride. However, if we honestly probe our hearts, we should all be asking ourselves 'do we focus on these because we are

lacking in other areas?' And nothing provides a better answer to this question than our response systems and the way our sense of nationhood crumbles when confronted squarely with a crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic is an apt example. It is true that India produces 8,000-9,000 tpd (ton per day) of oxygen and the medical demand for it previously never exceeded 15 per cent of our production. If complete liquifying arrangements were to be set up, Reliance alone will have a capacity to produce 25,000 tpd. That's almost eight times the amount of oxygen that was needed during the peak of the second Covid wave, when India required 3,000 tpd. But we only had 1,200 cryogenic tankers and only another 1000 of those carrying Nitrogen and Argon could be converted and pressed into service.

Further, the turn-around time and distance between the production clusters and the concentrated demand

(Contd on page 34)

## If you hold an Indian passport, which countries can you travel to now?

(SAI Bureau)-Summer getaway plans? Well, your choice this season is limited to Russia, some of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) like Ukraine, Egypt and South Africa,



possibly. These are some of the countries that have kept their doors open for Indian tourists, with

minimal travel restrictions. The second wave of the coronavirus pandemic in India has brought a host of flight bans to foreign countries. These include preferred holiday destinations such as the United Kingdom, Canada, United States, Europe, United Arab Emirates, Hong Kong, Thailand and Sri Lanka among others.

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Subodh Kumar Jaiswal, CISF Chief and Former Maharashtra DGP, Appointed New CBI Director



(SAI Bureau)- Former Maharashtra director general of police Subodh Kumar

(Contd on page 33)

## Bungled pandemic response, attack on culture: Why Lakshadweep is up in arms against administrator Praful Patel

(SAI Bureau)- Social media trouble began when Patel, a former was set abuzz when MLA from Gujarat, was appointed the #SaveLakshadweep began trending new administrator after his a few days ago. The people of the idyllic islands in the Arabian Sea, who are proud of their land's beauty and culture, are up in arms against Lakshadweep administrator Praful Patel for a host of reasons from mishandling the Covid-19 pandemic lifestyle. Faizal went a step further to trying to dictate what the islanders and charged that the new should or should not eat and drink. administrator is "spoiling the Lakshadweep MP Mohammad democratic fabric of India" with his Faizal told India Today that the



(Contd on page 31)

## Explained: The good, bad and ugly of investing in cryptocurrencies



(SAI Bureau)- Investing in cryptocurrencies has become a subject of debate over the past few weeks, owing to the high level of volatility seen in the virtual coin trading space - several rounds of ups and downs have been witnessed in the crypto market in a matter of two weeks.

On Tuesday, cryptocurrency prices recovered after plunging sharply on Sunday. Bitcoin, the world's most popular cryptocurrency, has bounced back after falling almost 12 per cent.

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## People are panic buying homes as prices skyrocket around the world

(SAI Bureau)-It wasn't long ago that real estate experts were bracing for the worst.

The coronavirus pandemic had sent large parts of the world into lockdown, shuttering businesses, costing tens of millions of workers their jobs and putting the housing market into a deep freeze. The number of people asking lenders for more time on their mortgage payments surged as the global recession hit. "This time last year we thought it was going to be 2008 all over again," said Kate Everett-Allen, the head of international residential research at real estate consultancy Knight Frank.

(Contd on page 31)

